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THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF ST. JOHN

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

By the
Rev. G. S. BARRETT, D.D.
Author of
'Musings for Quiet Hours,' etc.

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PREFACE

In preparing this Devotional Commentary on the First Epistle of St. John, I have availed myself, as far as I was able, of the best resources of modern scholarship. It is not more a pleasure than it is a duty to express my own obligations to two commentaries on this epistle which I regard as in every way the best and most suggestive of those published in this country. I refer to the Commentary by the late Bishop of Durham in the *Speaker's Commentary*, and to that issued in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools* by Dr. Plummer.

Each of these embodies not merely the ripest results of scholarship, but, what is even more valuable in the interpretation of St. John's writings, a profoundly spiritual apprehension of the teaching of the beloved disciple.

The Bible references in the course of the commentary are to the Revised Version.

George S. Barrett.

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I

THE EPISTLE AND ITS MESSAGE

THIS is really the last written of all the "catholic" epistles of the New Testament; for although it is quite possible that the second and third epistles are later in date than the first, they were letters addressed to private individuals, whereas the first epistle was written, not to any particular person, but for the Church as a whole. Hence the title given to it of a "catholic" or "general" epistle. We have, therefore, in it the last word of inspiration thus spoken to the Church of that age, and to the Church of God in every age since.

1 John.

The Last General Epistle.

The letter itself was written, beyond all possibility of doubt, by the beloved disciple himself, the Apostle John. He was then an old man, and, according to the uniform tradition of the early Church, was residing at Ephesus, of which he was the first Bishop, where his tomb, or what professes to be his tomb, is still shown to travellers.

Its Author.

1 John. External Testimony.

The testimony of all the earliest writers in the Christian Church, beginning with Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of St. John, and continuing right down to the third century of the Christian era, bears constant and uniform witness to the apostolic authorship of this epistle. But the epistle itself, in its tone and language and method, is the strongest of all evidences that the author of the fourth gospel was also the writer of this epistle. Strong as the external evidence of authorship is—and it could not be stronger—the internal evidence is even stronger, for none but the Apostle John himself could have written as this epistle is written. We shall find in the course of these expository studies how constantly the epistle reproduces some of the most characteristic teaching of the Gospel of St. John. Even the very words and phrases used are an echo of the gospel. Such words as "abide," "Advocate," "the truth," "the Only-begotten," "darkness," "light," "new commandment," and many others which might be quoted are found both in the gospel and in this epistle.

Internal Evidence.

Some Peculiarities: (1) No Address and no Names.

The late Bishop Westcott, who more than most men was pre-eminently qualified, both by his profound spirituality of life and by his intellectual gifts, to be a commentator on St. John, has drawn attention to two remarkable peculi-

arities in this epistle. First of all, it has no address, no subscription, and does not contain the name of any person or place. But the fact that it was, as has been said, a "catholic" epistle, and not, like the second and third letters, or the Epistle to Philemon, written to private persons, but was addressed to the Church as a whole, may sufficiently explain this complete absence of any personal reference in it.

(2) No Quotations from the Old Testament.

Again, the epistle is remarkable in that amongst all the writings of the New Testament, it alone, with the exception of the two shorter letters and the Epistle to Philemon, contains no single quotation from the Old Testament. Once, at least, it does refer (chap. iii. 12) to a well-known incident recorded in Old Testament history; but those copious quotations which, for example, mark the Epistle to the Hebrews, and many of the epistles of St. Paul, are conspicuously absent from this epistle.

(3) The Thought and the Diction.

A further pair of characteristics may be cited from Dr. Plummer, who says: "Two characteristics . . . will strike every serious reader, the almost oppressive majesty of the thoughts which are put before us, and the extreme simplicity of the language in which they are expressed." Indeed, so artless and simple is the language that, just as the perfect clearness of the water of

1 John.

a lake often conceals its real depth from one who stands gazing into it, so the fact that St. John uses words which the simplest can understand, is apt to hide from us that he is dealing with some of the deepest and greatest truths of the Redemption of Christ. "As we listen," to quote Dr. Plummer again, "and stop and ponder, we find that the simple words which at first seem to convey a meaning as simple as themselves, are charged with truths which are not of this world, but have their roots in the Infinite and Eternal."

The Epistle and the Fourth Gospel.

I have said that beyond all doubt the author of this epistle is the same apostle who wrote the fourth gospel, and that numberless minute indications both in the style and teaching of the epistle abundantly testify to this fact. The object and purpose of the epistle, however, are very different from that of the gospel. St. John himself tells us why he wrote the gospel that bears his name. "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name" (John xx. 31). The epistle, on the other hand, was written to those who already were possessed of this life in Christ, and to assure them of its possession. "These things," St. John says, "have I written unto you, that ye may know

that ye have eternal life, unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John v. 13). The gospel was written to produce faith, the epistle to produce the assurance of faith. 1 John.

Never was that assurance more deeply needed than in the age in which St. John wrote. This epistle, as I have already said, in all probability was written in the closing years of St. John's life. Irenæus tells us that the fourth gospel was written at Ephesus, and most probably this epistle was written there as well. We know, from the uniform tradition of the early Church, that the last period of St. John's life was spent at Ephesus, which was the centre, at that time, of the Asiatic Churches, and of which the apostle was the bishop; and to understand the teaching and the warnings of this epistle we must know something of the perils which then threatened the life of the Church of Christ. The Times and their Needs.

When St. John wrote, probably in the last years of the first century, the old controversies which had so largely marked St. Paul's apostolic work had almost died out. There is "no trace," Bishop Westcott says, in this epistle "of any conflict between the advocates of the Law and of the Gospel, between champions of works and of faith. The difference of Jew and Gentile, and the question of circumcision have no place in the New Perils.

1 John. composition. The names themselves do not occur." A wholly new but equally perilous danger now beset the Church, and of that danger Ephesus was in a very special sense the centre and home. A few words on the ancient city and the peculiar forms of anti-Christian thought which found a home there, will illustrate much of the teaching of this epistle.

Ephesus their Centre.

Ephesus, at the time St. John wrote, was the metropolitan city of Asia Minor. The site of the city was singularly beautiful. It was guarded by mountains on either side, that enclosed a fertile plain fourteen miles broad, and that reached to the blue waters of the Mediterranean, which then came right up to the ancient city, but, from the gradual filling up of the channel, have now receded many miles away.

The City.

Ephesus was regarded as "the first and greatest" of all the cities of Asia, and was distinguished, above all other things, for the magnificence of the temple erected to Artemis, the "great goddess Diana" of the Book of the Acts.

The city itself was about a mile away from the temple, and was connected with it by a road 35 feet broad, paved with solid marble, on which may still be plainly seen the mark of the chariot-wheels that traversed it. The greatest glory

of the city was that it was the "temple-keeper" of the goddess worshipped in the temple. When I stood, some short time ago, on the site of the vast and ancient theatre at Ephesus I saw an inscription in Greek on one of the stones of its walls that exactly accorded with the words of the Acts of the Apostles. "The great city of Ephesus," it said, "is the temple-keeper of the great Diana." 1 John.

The Temple of Diana.

That temple, of which nothing now remains but a few broken pillars and scattered fragments of marble lying dishonoured and neglected in a swamp, was then one of the seven wonders of the world. It was built of purest marble, and was 425 feet long, 220 feet broad, had 127 columns 60 feet high, and contained within its walls the greatest masterpieces of Greek art, one painting alone having cost, it was said, £38,000. It was sacred to the worship of Artemis, and as a sanctuary was inviolate to the whole world. It became therefore the safest of all depositories of treasure and an asylum for fugitives from justice.

Idolatry and Superstition.

As usual, the idolatrous worship at Ephesus was associated with superstitions of all kinds. Ephesus was, we are told, "pre-eminently the city of astrology, incantations, amulets, exorcisms, and every form of magical imposture." About

1 John.

the statue of the Ephesian Artemis were written unintelligible inscriptions, to which mysterious efficacy was attributed. Ephesian "charms" were much sought after. "Wicked folly of this kind," Dr. Plummer says, "had tainted the earliest Christian community at Ephesus. They had accepted the Gospel, and still secretly held fast their magic. Hence the bonfire of costly books of charms and incantations which followed upon the defeat of the sons of Sceva, when they attempted to use the name of Jesus as a magical form of exorcism" (Acts xix. 13-20).

Vice in their Train.

Associated with the idolatry and superstition of Ephesus were all kinds of nameless vice and wickedness. Every kind of abomination was practised both in the city and by the priests of the temple. Lascivious books, whose infamy was unspeakable, were openly sold in the streets. One Greek writer says that the whole Ephesian population deserved to be throttled, man by man, and that the morals of the temple and of its custodians were worse than those of the beasts. It was these abominations which gave Ephesus the infamous reputation of being the most dissolute city in Asia Minor.

The Gnostic Heresy.

And yet it was not even the superstitions and iniquities prevalent in Ephesus which were the chief reasons for St. John writing this wonderful

epistle. There was another and a newer peril, not less gross nor less urgent, that threatened the life not only of the Ephesian Church, but of all the Churches of Christ in Asia Minor, and this was the rise and the teachings of the so-called Gnostic heresy. The word "Gnostic" is derived from a Greek word signifying "to know," and the early Gnostic teachers professed to give to their disciples a whole system of truth, or of knowledge, that explained all the ultimate realities of existence and of being—God, man, the universe. Gnosticism itself was a strange compound of Oriental speculation, Greek thought, and some of the elements of Jewish and Christian teaching, and amongst its most characteristic doctrines were two that must be constantly borne in mind as we study this epistle. 1 John.

The Gnostic Claim.

First of all, the Gnostic professed to be in possession of the eternal truth, and he made the possession of this truth the one supreme thing in life. It was before morality or conduct. The intellect was the chief thing in man, not the conscience or the heart. The enlightened man, the Gnostic, was initiated into the final mysteries of the universe; and further, this initiation was the privilege, not of the many, but of the few. The Gospel of Jesus Christ came offering its blessings to all, to the poor and needy, to the

1 John.

wayfaring man; but the Gnostic confined his teaching to the very few who were privileged to listen to it.

The Gnostic Belief.

Next, and of still greater moral significance, the Gnostic believed that matter was the source of all evil, and was inherently evil; and this doctrine led, as we may readily see, by a straight road to the denial of the real humanity of our Lord. If matter was evil, then Jesus could not have possessed a true human body, nor indeed could He have been born of the Virgin Mary. His body, therefore, the Gnostics taught, was not a real, but only an apparent, or a phantom body; and it was this denial of the reality of the body of Christ that gave the name of "Doketics" to these early heretics. They taught that the body of Jesus only "seemed" (*δοκεῖν*) to be a body, but was not really one at all.

Cerinthus and his Teaching.

Amongst these Doketic teachers at Ephesus, at the time St. John lived there, was a man named Cerinthus. An early tradition has handed down a story that one day St. John met this man Cerinthus in a public bath in Ephesus, and seeing him the apostle ran out of the bath crying, "Let us fly, lest even the bath fall on us, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within." Irenæus says he heard the story from those who heard it from Polycarp, the disciple of St. John,

but whether it is authentic or not it shows us at any rate the horror attributed to St. John at the teachings of Cerinthus. Nor was the horror unfounded. Cerinthus taught that Jesus was not born of the Virgin Mary, that He was the son of Joseph and of Mary; that He was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men; and that at His baptism the Christ descended upon Him in the form of a dove from God; but that at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered, while Christ remained impassible, being a spiritual being. 1 John.

When we read in this epistle the solemn warning St. John utters against any teaching that denies the true humanity of our Lord, as for example when he says, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God; every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God; and this is the spirit of the Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already," it is plain that the apostle had in his mind these Gnostic teachings of Cerinthus and of others, which subverted the whole Christian faith. St. John's Denunciation.

Closely associated with the Gnostic teaching that matter itself was an evil thing, and indeed directly resulting from it, was the Antinomian Gnosticism and Antinomianism.

1 John. immorality sanctioned and practised by many of the Gnostics. If matter is altogether evil, then this material body is wholly evil, and nothing that you can do will make it any more so than it is. It does not, therefore, matter in the least what the body does. One may practise any vileness or abomination with the body or in the body, and you will not defile a thing already unutterably defiled. Nor was this all the terrible evil of the Gnostic teaching. They also taught that since the soul of man was the spiritual element of his being, it was incorruptible by any evil wrought in the body. To use their own favourite metaphor, quoted by Irenæus, they said that just as pure gold is uncontaminated by plunging in the mire, and loses none of its preciousness, so the soul is entirely untouched and undefiled by the actions of this material body.

The Christian Contrast.

It is easy to see that such teaching would sanction every kind of vice and licentiousness; and, as a matter of fact, many of these early Gnostics made their immoralities part of their religious, or professedly religious creed. When we hear St. John saying, "We know that . . . we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as He is pure";

or when in the earlier part of the epistle we read, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," it is hardly possible to doubt that these solemn words were directly directed against much of the most characteristic teaching and many of the most characteristic practices of these early heretics. 1 John.

Now the chief peril to Christianity in the days of St. John did not arise from pagan assault and from pagan superstition, it arose from those who, professing to accept the substance, or part of the substance of the Christian revelation, and to give to the initiated the real meaning of that revelation, really destroyed the whole substance of the truth as it is in Jesus. In professing to explain the Gospel they really explained it away; and hence it was that Gnosticism, in one or other of its varied and diverse forms, was the deadliest foe the Church had to encounter. The same thing is true of our own day. The present dangers to faith do not arise from open opposition of the truth—from the atheist, and agnostic, and materialist—they arise from those who, professing to give a higher and more reasonable explanation of the contents of that faith, really destroy it altogether. There can be no question of the absolute denial of all that is precious in our faith that is found in the writings of men A Modern Peril.

1 John. who deny the personality of God, and the possibility of the supernatural occurring in human history; but a far more subtle and even greater peril to the faith to-day is to be found in those who, for example, extol our Lord as the greatest of all ethical teachers, as the highest and noblest example of all human goodness, as the tenderest and kindest of friends, but deny His Virgin birth, His supernatural works, His atoning death, and His bodily resurrection from the dead.

The Real Foe. The real foe to Christianity to-day is this "other Gospel" which "is not another," under whatsoever variety of forms it may be preached. We may say of it what, according to a very ancient reading in this epistle, St. John says of the deniers of the faith in his day—"Every spirit which annulleth Jesus is not of God" (iv. 3).

II

THE INTRODUCTION

1 JOHN i. 1–4

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life ;

2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us ;)

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

1 John i. 1–4. The Structure of the Epistle.

IT is extremely difficult to discover the exact plan of this epistle and the connecting link—if any—between its various verses. Indeed, up to the beginning of the last century the prevailing view amongst expositors seems to have been that there was no logical or definite connexion between the successive chapters and verses of the epistle, but that it consisted of detached and isolated sayings of St. John, not even hung together, like pearls on a thread, on any one

1 John i. 1–4.

connecting thought, but written down as they were suggested to the mind of the apostle. Calvin, in his dissertation on the epistle, speaks of it as containing doctrine and exhortation intermixed; and after enumerating some of its principal themes, he adds, "*Verum nihil horum continua serie facit*" ("But none of these does he make in a continuous order").

An Order and a Theme.

We shall see later on, I think, that although the analysis of the epistle may differ, and does differ, with different expositors, yet that it is possible to discern some connected order in the epistle, and that it forms as a whole a great commentary on its central theme, "Fellowship with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

On one point, however, nearly all expositors are agreed, and that is that the first four verses of the first chapter are introductory to all that follows; and it is this introduction that will occupy the present paper. It is in the Revised Version as follows:—

"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellow-

ship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that our joy may be fulfilled." **1 John i. 1–4.**

These opening verses of the epistle—in which there are compressed the profoundest thoughts, almost too great to be expressed in words, thoughts which by their repetition seem to be struggling for utterance in the mind of St. John—evidently take us back to the beginning of the gospel written by the same apostle. The parallels, even in expression, between the epistle and the gospel are very remarkable and interesting. "That which was from the beginning," "In the beginning was the Word," "Which was with the Father," "The Word was with God," are coincidences of expression which not only point unmistakably to the fact that the author of the epistle and of the gospel were one and the same person, but indicate how profoundly the pre-existence of the Word and His manifestation in the flesh had occupied his mind. The same note is struck at the commencement both of the gospel and of the epistle.

Parallel Expressions.

Not only so, but the reader will also detect the same characteristic words in these opening verses which we meet with so frequently in the Gospel of St. John. Such terms as "manifested," "witness," "life," "eternal life," "joy fulfilled," remind

Characteristic Words.

1 John i. 1–4.

us of much that is recorded in the gospel, and show us how in writing these verses St. John was going back in thought to that great historic manifestation of the Son of God which forms the substance of his gospel.

Apostolic Authority.

He writes moreover with the authority of an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He, the last remaining representative of the twelve apostles, speaks in their name as well as in his own, and speaks with the fulness of his apostolic authority —"That which we have seen and heard," he says, "declare we unto you." I have just used the expression "the great historic manifestation of the Son of God," to declare which was the purpose of the Gospel of St. John. It is worth while to dwell for a few moments on this fact. The same sublime truth comes out, as has been said, in these opening verses. St. John purposely accumulates words one upon another, to assure us of the historic reality of the truth to which he is witnessing: "We have heard," "we have seen with our eyes," "we beheld," "our hands handled," he says of the "Word of life," the terms gradually rising to a climax of unmistakable evidence. "Hearing," "seeing," "beholding," "handling," St. John says. And as "seeing" is more than "hearing," so "beholding," the fixed gaze, is more than "seeing,"

A Great Purpose.

and "handling" is still more unmistakable evidence than "beholding." 1 John i. 1–4.

There can be little doubt, I think, that in this last expression there is a definite reference to the account St. John himself gives, and that he alone of the four evangelists gives, of that special manifestation of the risen Lord that was granted to Thomas; and the reference, as Bishop Westcott says, "is the more worthy of notice, because St. John does not mention the fact of the resurrection in his epistle." It was to Thomas the Lord said, "Reach hither thy finger, and see My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into My side." And there can be little doubt that there is a distinct echo of this incident in the expression "our hands have handled." St. John and the Appearance to Thomas.

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a philosophic speculation, like Plato's *Republic;* it is not a work of lofty ethical teaching, like the writings of Marcus Aurelius or of Confucius; still less is it a "sweet Galilean vision," as Matthew Arnold called it. It is history, in the first place; it rests on fact, not on supposition or imagination, but on the manifestation of the Eternal Word in human flesh as a great and well-attested historic reality. The Gospel rests on Facts

Yet, wonderful as was the manifestation vouchsafed to man of "the life, the eternal life —But is not Exhaustive.

1 John i. 1–4.

which was with the Father," it was not, and could not be, a complete and full manifestation of all that the Eternal Word was and is. There is a remarkable expression used by the apostle in this connexion, the significance of which is lost in the translation in the Authorised Version, "of the Word of life." The more correct translation is found in the Revised Version, "concerning the Word of life." Howsoever rich and full was the gracious manifestation of the Word vouchsafed in the human life of our Lord, it could never be a complete revelation of the Son of God. The infinite could never be fully revealed in time, and so St. John says all that has been heard and seen and beheld and handled was still only "concerning the Word of life." It revealed Him; but there was still much necessarily unrevealed. Much as was known of our Lord, there was still much that was unknown.

III

THE AIMS OF THE LETTER

1 JOHN i. 3, 4

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

1 John i. 3, 4. The Two Aims of the Writer.

AFTER these opening words the apostle goes on to declare his object in writing this epistle. That object was twofold; first of all, that his readers may have "fellowship with us," and next, that "our" or "your" joy "may be fulfilled."

It will be well for us to consider each of these great objects separately and carefully.

The First Aim is—that his readers may have Fellowship.

The first end St. John has in view in declaring to his readers the manifestation of the "eternal life which was with the Father" is, that they "also"—they as well as the apostles—"may have fellowship with us." Here we come at once upon one of the greatest and most important truths of the Christian life—that it is not a life lived apart, and in isolation, but a life common to, and shared by, all other believers in Christ.

1 John i. 3, 4.

The Christian Life Social.

The Christian life, in a word, is more than the individual life of the believer in Christ; it is the life of a society, in which all believers have their place; it is the life of a body, of which each believer is a member; it is the life of a family, the family of God, of which each Christian is a member. There is, perhaps, special reason for emphasising this truth in the present day, as there is no little peril of our forgetting that individualism in faith—valuable and essential as it may be—is not the whole of "the truth as it is in Jesus." The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ begins, it is true, with the message of faith to the individual, but it does not end there. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," is its first word, but its next is, "and thy house." In fact, just as the natural life cannot be fully perfected in solitude or isolation, so the supernatural life needs the "communion of saints," that "fellowship" of which St. John speaks, for its full development and perfection.

The Church and the Individual.

The Church is as much a necessity to the supernatural life as the home is to the natural life. The Church is not a mere luxury to the Christian life; it is essential to its complete development and expression. There is no more serious peril in the present day, so far as the spiritual life is concerned, than the gradual loss of the Church

idea, and the comparative indifference of many very excellent Christian people to any real fellowship in the Church. The greatest revival needed to-day is a revival of the sense of the importance and value of Church life to the individual believer. We are "builded," St. Paul says, "together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." 1 John i. 3, 4.

The Fellowship Explained.

But St. John goes on to tell us more exactly what is the real value of the fellowship he and the other apostles enjoyed, and which he desires his readers should share with them. "Our fellowship"—and this "our" is very emphatic in the Greek; it means, "this is our fellowship and we enjoy it"—he says, "is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

The Persons of the Godhead.

The words are full of deep and solemn meaning. They bring us into the presence of the greatest and profoundest mysteries in the revelation God has made of Himself in His Son and by His Son. They point, first of all, to the distinction of personality—if we may use an inaccurate and, in some respects, a misleading word—within the Godhead. Dr. Plummer points out that the Greek, literally rendered, runs thus: "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son of Him, Jesus Christ," and that "both the preposition and the definite article are repeated,

1 John i. 3, 4.

marking emphatically the distinction and equality between the Son and the Father."

Human language is wholly inadequate to express what we mean by this distinction in the persons of the Godhead. It is far easier to say what we do not mean than what we do mean by the words. We do not mean that the Father and the Son are two distinct persons, as two men are two persons, nor do we, on the other hand, mean that the Father and the Son are only two diverse manifestations of the one eternal God. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity declares that within the Godhead there is an eternal distinction in what, for want of any adequate term, we call the divine personality of the Godhead, that the Father and Son are eternally distinct, Fatherhood and Sonship being everlasting realities in the life of God.

The Unity of the Godhead.

But the apostle does more than emphasise the distinction between the Father and the Son. He unites them in the glory and honour of the Godhead. He says, "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." Imagine these words being used of any human being, howsoever great and good, of even the chief of the apostles, for instance. The supposition is not only blasphemous, it is impossible; and yet we hear them said of the Lord Jesus Christ without

any such feeling. They bear witness, not less striking because it is indirect, to the Godhead of Him who we call "our Lord." 1 John i. 3, 4.

Last of all, in this connexion, it is worthy of notice that St. John again bears witness to the historic manifestation of God in Christ. After the words "His Son," he adds the double name of our Lord, "Jesus Christ." The full title, "His Son Jesus Christ," is never used in the New Testament without some special significance; and in this place beyond all doubt it witnesses to the full truth concerning our Lord's person, first as the "Son" of God sharing the glory and honour of the Father, next to the reality of His manifestation in human flesh—"Jesus," and last of all to the fact that this Jesus was none other than the long-promised Messiah, the "Christ." The Manifestation in Jesus Christ.

The second great purpose the apostle has in writing he tells us in the next words, "These things we write that our—or your—joy may be fulfilled." "Our" is the reading adopted by the Revised Version; but Bishop Westcott says the reading "your" is also well supported, and that both of the readings "our" and "your" give good sense. It appears to me that "your" gives a better sense than "our," and harmonises more perfectly with the context, so that we shall read, The Second Aim: that the readers may be filled with joy.

1 John i. 3, 4.

"that your joy may be fulfilled." The words, indeed, are an echo of the similar words of our Lord, "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be fulfilled" (John xv. 11; *cf.* John xvii. 13).

The Relation of Joy to Fellowship.

The sequence of thought here is most significant and important. St. John has just been saying that the great object of his writing was that his readers may "have fellowship with us" in that great and solemn communion which he and all the apostles had with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ; and now he adds a second purpose he has in view in writing, "that your joy may be fulfilled." We learn, therefore, again from these words the lesson to which reference has already been made, that the joy and blessedness of the divine life depend on the realisation of our common fellowship in the Lord.

That this is true, so far as communion with God is concerned, every true Christian will at once admit. Without prayer and communion—"the communion of the Holy Ghost"—no Christian can be a happy Christian, least of all can he be filled with joy. The neglect of fellowship with God dries up all the deeper sources of gladness within the soul, and makes the pilgrim walk in a waterless desert where there are no

cool and refreshing springs. We all know this to be true ; but do we as fully and readily realise that fellowship with our brethren in Christ is quite as essential to the joy of the Christian life as fellowship with God ? 1 John i. 3, 4.

Isolation fatal to Happiness.

From this point of view, all that has already been said on the necessity of Church life to the perfecting and blessedness of the divine life within the soul takes a new force and a new solemnity. The isolated and solitary Christian can never be a happy Christian. A man might doubtless live a kind of life on a desert island, or in a hermit's cave, but he could never live a happy or blessed life in enforced solitude and isolation from his fellows. Solitary confinement is always one of the most terrible forms of punishment that is inflicted on criminals; indeed, it is so terrible that in no civilised country, so far as I am aware, is it ever allowed for life. It has been found by experience all the world over that to shut a man up by himself alone for a long period, even when no other punishment is allowed, is to endanger, if not life itself, all that makes human life worth living.

Isolation a Danger to the Spiritual Life.

The same truth applies to the spiritual life of all believers in Christ. It may be possible for a Christian, perhaps, to live a Christian life out of all fellowship or contact with his fellow-believers,

1 John i. 3, 4.

although even this is doubtful, but it is certainly impossible for that life to be a joyful life. One reason for the marked absence of all exulting joy in the modern religious life may be found, I believe, in the loss, to which reference has already been made, of all reality in the fellowship of Church life. The Church is no longer the august and blessed home of the saints, the family of God, in which every child of God has his place and his own duties to fulfil ; it is too often only a name for an organisation with which many professing Christians have little or no concern.

The Call to Fellowship not to be neglected.

One of the gravest defects of some of the evangelistic missions and revivals of the present day, which have doubtless been greatly blessed of God to the conversion of many souls, is that the mission-preacher seldom, if ever, says anything to the newly-made convert of the privilege and necessity of seeking the communion and fellowship of the Church as the first step in his new life in God. He is left, too often, to imagine that repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have completed all that creates the spiritual life ; with the result that he either soon drifts away into indifference and coldness, and loses the religious life that has been commenced, or becomes one of the sadly numerous class of religious nomads, wandering from Church to

Church, and finding a home in none. The home is not more essential to the protection and nurture of the newly-born child than the Church is to the "babe in Christ." **1 John i. 3, 4.**

The Church of God in this and in every land can undertake no more solemn or blessed work than the serious attempt to make its fellowship so dear and so inviting that it shall attract to itself, by an irresistible compulsion, all who have received eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, and then only, will their "joy be fulfilled."

IV

THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST

1 JOHN i. 5, 6

5 This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

1 John i. 5, 6. The Message.

WITH these verses St. John commences the main theme of his epistle, as he himself indicates in the opening words, "This is the message which we have heard of Him." This message, with its great and solemn implications, occupies the whole of the first part of the epistle, which most commentators admit closes with the end of the second chapter. What the "message" was the apostle tells us—"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." On the manifold and suggestive meanings of the words we shall dwell later on, but first it will help to give us a clearer conception of the order and purpose of the epistle as a whole if we bear in mind that all this first part of the epistle is "dominated," as Dr. Plummer most suggestively points out, by the statement in this opening verse, that "God is light," just as

the second half of the epistle is governed by the corresponding and completing statement that "God is love." There may be differences of opinion and of judgment as to the way in which the apostle works out the successive results of each of these vital statements concerning the nature of God, but there can be little doubt, I imagine, that each of them does form the key-note, so to speak, of one-half of the epistle. 1 John i. 5, 6.

We begin with the first word concerning God, "God is light." God is Light.

St. John tells us that he heard this from Christ Himself, for the words "from Him" refer back to our Lord, Who is the subject of the opening verses of the epistle. The fact that we have here a record of some teaching of Christ, and of most important teaching, of which no account is given in any of the gospels, affords one illustration, amongst many others, of what St. John himself says in his gospel, that there "are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written" (John xxi. 25).

One other word, but equally great word, St. John does record as having been spoken by our Lord. "God is spirit" (John iv. 24), for there ought to be no indefinite article before the God is Spirit —and Love.

1 John i. 5, 6.

noun, as if God were only one out of many spirits. He Himself and in Himself is "spirit." This is the first of the three great revealing words concerning God, as He is in Himself, which the New Testament contains. The second is the "message" St. John tells us he heard from Christ Himself, that "God is light," and careful readers will notice that it stands midway between the first word "God is spirit" and the third and last word "God is love." It shares with "spirit" its idea of immateriality and purity, and with "love" its warmth and diffusiveness. It is the connecting link between God as spirit and God as love.

A Message from the Lord Himself.

This great and momentous truth concerning God as He is in Himself was no discovery that St. John had made; it was, as we have seen, a "message" he had "heard" from the lips of Jesus Himself. Our knowledge of God does not rest on the researches and triumph of the human intellect; it rests on the revelation God has made of Himself in His Son and through His Son; and this again leads us back to the vital truth on which we were dwelling in our last chapter, that our faith primarily rests on history, on the solid ground of fact, as seen and embodied in the manifestation of God in the person and life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Message of Christ

A message only asks to be faithfully delivered, and the apostle is so conscious of this that he uses a special and peculiar word to describe his function as an apostle commissioned to deliver the message. He says that "the message" which we "heard" from Christ we "announce" unto you. The Authorised Version has "declare," but the word is not exactly the same word translated by "declare" in ver. 3; it is a modification of that word, the word having a different preposition affixed to it, and one that conveys the idea of making known, or handing on, something that had been heard before, to someone to whom the message is brought.

1 John i. 5, 6.
The Messenger—a Witness.

The apostle has no higher or more glorious office than to be a "witness" to the truth as he has received it from Christ. He is not an inventor, not a discoverer, not even a searcher after truth; he is a witness to what he has heard, a messenger sent; he is an apostle who is commissioned to deliver a message.

It would be impossible to touch, even briefly, on all the implications of this word concerning God that He "is light"; all we can do is to suggest some of the principal of these meanings, leaving to our readers the profitable and pleasant task of pondering them for themselves in greater detail at their leisure.

God is Light.

1 John i. 5, 6. God Revealed.

First of all, there can be little doubt that as "light" the awful and stainless purity and holiness of God are suggested. Plato once said—and the saying is perhaps one of the sublimest of all the uninspired words of antiquity—that "light was the shadow of God"; but the apostle carries us to a deeper and more sacred truth when he tells us that God Himself "is light." And the holiness and purity which are revealed in the Word are still further emphasised in the enlarged and emphatic negative the apostle now adds, "and in Him is no darkness at all." The form of the negative statement, as Bishop Westcott says, is "remarkable," for it literally reads thus: "Darkness there is not in Him! no, not at all," the doubled negative in the Greek being purposely added to strengthen and to emphasise the statement concerning the nature of God as "light."

But the perfect and absolute purity of God is not the only truth involved in these words.

God as the Source of Life.

Light is more than power; it is the sustainer of all life, for without light life and growth are impossible. A recent scientific writer has said that in the sun lies hid all the possibility of life of plant and animal and man; and in like manner the eternal God is the one sole fountain of all the varied and wonderful life of the universe.

Then again, light is very beautiful; it is, indeed, the sole origin of all the radiant and perfect beauty of Nature, for each separate flower only derives the beauty of its colouring from the light. The Psalmist had a vision of the glorious beauty of God when he said he longed for "one thing to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." **1 John i. 5, 6. —And of Beauty.**

But again, light is endlessly diffusive. You can shut light out, but you cannot shut light in; and so we may say with reverence of God that we cannot confine His gracious and wonder-working power. He is ceaselessly revealing Himself to His creatures, in His created universe, in the perfect wisdom of His providence, in all the long course of human history, and above all in the person and work of His dear Son. This thought leads us naturally to the next suggestion of these words, that as the sunshine not only illuminates but warms all creation, so God is not a cold, passionless Spirit. He is love as well as light, the living fires of which are kindled in every responsive heart. **—And of Power.** **Yet full of Love.**

Last of all, it is not straining the meaning of St. John's words to say that as light is itself absolutely invisible, and only becomes visible by being reflected from some object, so God in His eternal being is the "invisible" God, "whom no **God Manifest in the Son.**

1 John i. 5, 6.

man hath seen, nor can see," but He is revealed by being reflected from His creation, and above all He is revealed in the incarnate Son of God. And this is in accordance with what St. John himself says in the opening chapters of his gospel, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son" (many very ancient authorities read "God only begotten"), "which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

No Fellowship of Light with Darkness.

This declaration or "message" that "God is light" leads on to what now follows, that it is impossible for us to have fellowship with God Who is "light," and to be walking in the darkness. Three times over in the next five verses the apostle uses the expression "if we say," as if he were desirous of associating himself and all the other apostles in the case he suggests, impossible though it is. And he is not content with merely asserting the utter falsity of any profession of fellowship with God and the "walking in darkness," but after his manner, he heightens and strengthens the assertion by the restatement in an even stronger form of what he had just said. "We lie, and do not the truth," St. John says, and this negative addition to the previous statement evidently contains a fuller denial of the profession thus made, for "doing"

is even more than saying, and manifestly includes the whole conduct of life. The man who makes a profession of being in fellowship with the eternal light, and whose life is lived in sin, is a man not only whose words are false, but whose whole life is a falsehood as well. It is vitiated and rotten to the core by the insincerity of the profession he has just made. 1 John i. 5, 6.

In contrast with this sad and shameful denial of the truth of God is the life of the true believer in Christ. He does not "walk in the darkness" but he "walks in the light." Neither evil nor good is ever stationary; character is never really at rest, for we are all ceaselessly moving some whither, either "walking in the darkness" or "walking in the light." God alone is unchanged and unchanging. There is no progress in the Divine Being. He is "in the light" absolutely and unutterably, as St. Paul says (1 Tim. vi. 16). He "dwells in light unapproachable"; we, on the contrary, are always going forward or backward, "walking" in "the light" or "walking" in "the darkness." The Christian moves onward in the divine life from one stage to another as he grows in grace, just as the evil man passes into ever-deepening darkness as he nears the end of his way. It is one of the most solemn and arresting thoughts which can lay hold of the

The Believer Walks in the Light.

1 John i. 5, 6.

mind, that neither spiritually nor morally do we ever occupy the same position year after year. The "law of life in Christ Jesus," or "the law of sin and death," asserts its dominion over us, and our steps are ever moving either upward along the way of life or downward along the paths of death.

V

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

1 JOHN i. 6

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

ST. JOHN now comes to the two great and most blessed results of "walking in the light." First of all we have fellowship one with another; and next, in the vision of the holiness of God, we discover and are conscious of the reality of our own sin. **1 John i. 6.**

One Result—Fellowship.

It is somewhat remarkable and most significant that the apostle does not here repeat what he had just before said of "fellowship with God," as we might have expected he would have done. Indeed, so natural is that expectation, that Dr. Plummer says, "the craving to make this verse the exact antithesis of the preceding one has generated another reading" as old as the second century—"We have fellowship with Him." The real reason for the altered expression to be found in this verse is to be sought in the fact that fellowship with "one another" in the body of Christ is the human

—With Another and with God.

1 John i. 6. expression and result of all real fellowship with God. The communion of saints is an unmistakable proof that the saints themselves are in communion with God; and, on the other hand, the interruption of our own personal fellowship with God, dryness and barrenness in prayer, loss of all joy in worship or in praise, are due, far more often than we are apt to believe, to a breach in our fellowship with one another. This is the reason why all discussion and strife and party spirit in a Church are fatal to any real spirit of prayer. The dew only falls on the thirsty earth when the night is still, and the benediction of the favour and smile of God never descends save on the heart at peace with itself and all its brethren.

True Fellowship only Possible to the Good.

There is another reason for the emphasis here laid on the communion of saints as the first result of "walking in the light." There is never any bond of permanent union amongst evil men; there may be temporary association, and for evil purposes, as we sometimes see in confederates in crime or partners in some deed of shame and of sin, but the union never lasts. Evil naturally and inevitably tends to disintegration and self-destruction, just as the rottenness of a tree inevitably leads to its fall. Illustrations and exemplifications of this great moral truth

abound on every hand. We see it, for example, in the decay and dissolution of the great empires of the ancient world, which came to their end, not so much from foes without as from foes within — from their luxury, selfishness, vice, cruelty, and oppression. We see it, to take only another instance, in the short-lived "fraternity" of the French Revolution, a fraternity that ended in a deluge of blood; and we shall see the same law working out the destruction of our own loved land, if evil be allowed to go on unchecked. It is not wealth nor learning nor alms that are the real foundation of the greatness and stability of any nation, but, as the Book of Proverbs says, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach"—the Septuagint translation here renders "weakeneth any people." Society is impossible in the night, and fellowship with man is only possible when we walk in the light.

1 John i. 6.

Evil breeds Disunion and Decay.

The bonds which are fastened by goodness and purity and love never loosen. The ties of spiritual kinship are permanent ties. There is no cessation in the blessed fellowship of the redeemed; it begins on earth, but is continued and perfected in the eternal world. The "Father's house," the "city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," will be the final revelation of the "communion of saints."

Righteousness is a Bond of Union.

1 John i. 6.

A Second Result—the Discovery of Sin.

A second result of this walk in the light now comes to be mentioned. It leads to the discovery of sin, of our own sin, and so St. John adds, "and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." The connexion of these words with what has gone before is not accidental, for our walking in the light first of all discloses to us the reality of our own sin, and then reveals to us the perfect cleansing that God has provided from sin in "the blood of Jesus His Son."

The Revealing Light.

The vision of sin is only possible in the light. One of the first evidences and signs of the coming of the Spirit of God—and His coming is the coming of the light in the heart—is a new discovery of the depth and reality of sin. It is the imperfect light, the twilight, in which so many professing Christians live that accounts for that weakened sense of sin which is so marked a feature of the present day.

Some little time ago a tourist who was walking through the Lake District was overtaken at night by a heavy storm of wind and of rain, and soon got soaked to the skin. In the darkness he was glad to see the twinkling of a light by the roadside that proved to be the light of a little inn, in which he at once took shelter from the pitiless rain. The landlord, with a rushlight, showed him to what looked like a fairly clean

and comfortable room, and the weary and soaked traveller was glad to get rid of his wet things and to have them dried by the morning. 1 John i. 6.

He was awoke by the morning sun streaming through the window, and the moment his eyes were opened he was horrified to see the room in which he had been sleeping. The walls and the floor and even the curtains were filthy, and he was glad to escape from the room as quickly as possible. The night before he thought the room was fairly clean, now he saw its foulness; but the room had not changed during the night, it was only the light that had changed. The little rushlight was not light enough to reveal all the dirt of the room, but when the sunlight of heaven came streaming in the revelation was made in a moment—and it is so with the vileness of our own hearts. —Its Power.

If we are living far from God, in imperfect light, we shall never realise our own sinfulness or our need of Christ; if we "walk in the light" we shall discover at once the pollution and selfishness within. And this is the reason for the paradox that has been constantly true all through the history of the Christian Church—that it is from the greatest saints we always hear the most bitter confessions of their own sin. It was St. Paul who at the close of his life called himself Sainthood and Imperfection.

1 John i. 6. "the chief of sinners"; it was Augustine who wrote those "Confessions" which even now move us to tears; it was St. Catherine of Siena, whose lips seemed pure as a white lily, who bewailed her sins in words which sound exaggerated in our ears; it was St. Francis of Assisi who injured his eyesight, his biographer tells us, by weeping over his own sins; it was Luther who cried out in agony, "Oh, my sins! my sins!" Conviction of sin, deep, intense, painful, is always the result of the coming of the Holy Ghost into the heart, the dawning of the fuller light of God.

A Third Result—the Revelation of the Saviour.

But St. John does not end here. The revelation of sin is not the only result of the light. It reveals also the Saviour from sin, and so the next words we read are these, "And the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Let me say, in passing, that it is not without the deepest meaning that the apostle here speaks of the "blood" of the Son of God.

—Who truly died.

Cerinthus, amongst other heretics, had denied that the Son of God had ever died on the cross. At the baptism, he taught that Christ had descended on the man Jesus, but had left Him again when He was crucified; and the death of Jesus was therefore only the death of a man, not the perfect sacrifice of the eternal Son of God for the sin of the world. The solemn words, "the

blood of Jesus His Son," are a witness against this perilous heresy. When Jesus died, there was the death of One who Himself was the eternal Son of God. The blood of Jesus, as St. Paul says, was "the blood of God" (Acts xx. 28). 1 John i. 6.

—A Saviour from Sin.

And this blood of the Son of God "cleanseth us from all sin." The blood, that is, not only takes away the guilt of sin—it does that first of all and before all things else, for if it did not remove the guilt of sin it would do nothing for the conscience, whose primary need is not cleansing, but pardon—but it does more than that, it takes away the defilement of sin. The blood of Jesus removes at once the guilt of sin and the sin itself. It is of sin "the double cure"; it "cleanses from its guilt and power."

His Cleansing Power.

Nor is the significance of the present tense "cleanseth" to be overlooked. The present tenses of the Bible are always full of meaning, and will repay careful study, as for instance when we read, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life," or "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"; and not the least memorable and significant of these present tenses is this "cleanseth." The saving and purifying power of the Cross is never completed, never exhausted, it goes on continuously and continually.

1 John i. 6. Every day we need the cleansing, and every day the cleansing is offered to us; as Frances Ridley Havergal used to say, "There is instant forgiveness on instant repentance from sin." The complete justification and acceptance of the believer in Christ, an acceptance and justification which never change, do not do away with the recurring sins of daily life, as our Lord Himself reminds us, "he that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet"; but he does need that washing, and it is provided for in the daily and hourly "cleansing" of the blood of Jesus.

—From All Sin. And let us not forget that in this "cleansing" by the blood of Jesus there are two most blessed realities. First of all, it is cleansing "from all sin." That forgiveness of sins which comes to us through the sacrificial death of Jesus is complete and perfect.

So far as the guilt of all past sin is concerned, it is done with for ever. The Psalmist's prayer has been heard and answered, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Nor is this cleansing, as has been said, restricted to the removal of the guilt of past sin alone. "The blood of Jesus" does an even greater and more wonderful work—wonderful as that is—than take away our guilt, it takes away the sin itself. We are not only justified, but we are "sanctified," as

our Lord Himself said to St. Paul, by "faith" in Him; and St. Peter showed how fully he had realised this gracious power of faith when he spoke of how God had "cleansed" the "hearts" of the Gentiles "by faith." No one has any right to claim the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ unless that forgiveness is a cleansing from sin as well as a pardon for sin; indeed, these two great realities of grace are inseparably connected—as inseparably as the fruit and the root of the tree are—for the one is really dependent on the other. The distinction between forgiveness and cleansing, or between justification and sanctification, is not that one comes to us through the work of the Spirit, and the other through the work of Christ, for both these divine and gracious operations are so closely united that Christ's death never brings to any man forgiveness who is not moved by the Spirit to faith, and the Spirit never works save through the Cross of Christ; but the real distinction is the old but most true one, that justification is the act of God, and is final and complete, whilst sanctification is God's work in man, and is never complete on earth. In any case the "cleansing" of the blood of Jesus is so complete and real that it removes the stain as well as the guilt of sin. The redeemed have "washed their robes,

1 John i. 6.

Cleansing and Pardon.

1 John i. 6. and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Cleansing the Heart.

And then, last of all, let us not fail to notice that it is not merely from "sins"—that is, from separate and individual transgressions—that the blood of Christ "cleanses" us, but it is from "all sin"—that is, from the root and principle of all sin within the heart. This expressive and impressive use of the singular noun "sin" is not accidental, for St. John uses both the plural and the singular in this epistle, but in each case each word with its own special shade of meaning (*cf.* i. 9; ii. 2, 12; iv. 10 for the plural, and i. 7; iii. 8 for the singular), and our Lord Himself uses both the plural and the singular in significant connexion (*cf.* John viii. 21, 24). This cleansing of the blood of Christ is so radical and complete that it extends far beyond the removal of the stain of any particular transgression; it reaches down to the root of all transgression in a sinful heart, and it purifies and sanctifies that heart. It is a blessed thing to be assured of the merciful forgiveness of our God for all sins, but it is not less blessed to know that when God forgives He cleanses as well, and that in the blood of Christ we have the one and never-failing power that by the Spirit of all grace creates "a clean heart."

VI

SIN, CONFESSION, PARDON, CLEANSING

1 JOHN i. 8–10

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

ST. JOHN now completes what he has to say about sin, and the relation the believer who walks in the light bears to sin. **1 John i. 8–10.**

The Denial of Sin.

The apostle begins by contrasting the denial or unconsciousness of sin that was manifest in some at Ephesus, with that penitent acknowledgment of sin which always marks those who walk in the light. He is doubtless quoting the actual words which some had used at Ephesus, who denied their own sin, although he modestly unites himself in the condemnation he pronounces on them. "If we say," he continues, "that we have no sin"—the expression having "no sin" being purposely used to mark the inward principle or source of sin, as distinguished from its manifestation—indeed, two things follow.

1 John i. 8–10. Self-Deception.

First of all, we are deceiving ourselves, the active voice of the verb being used to emphasise the solemn fact that the self-deception is our fault, not our misfortune—we are "deceiving ourselves," or "we are leading ourselves astray"; and next, "the truth is not in us." The truth is the Word of God as it is revealed in Christ, the supernatural Gospel of the grace of God. The truth may, therefore, be regarded either as objective truth, without us (*cf.* v. 6, "we . . . do not the truth"), or as subjective truth, within us. The self-deceived sinner is living a life of untruth, just because he is walking in the darkness.

The Place of Confession.

And this leads to the contrast between the open confession of sin the believer makes to God, and the denial of sin of which St. John has just spoken. But why does the apostle make this confession to God a condition of our obtaining the divine forgiveness? We may understand why the frank acknowledgment of a fault, or an offence, committed against our fellow-man is a condition of his forgiving us, and of the reconciliation of the injured party with the offender, for in the case of wrongdoing between man and man the acknowledgment of the wrongdoing is often the first discovery of the offence to him who has been wronged, or if it be not, it is at least a proof of genuine sorrow for having com-

mitted it; but God does not need us to tell Him when we have sinned, for He knows all things. Nor does He require our confession to prove to Him our true repentance. This is perfectly true, but we may need confession, we do need it, to disclose to ourselves the full reality of our own sin; for just as silence conceals the sin it refuses to acknowledge, so confession to God drags the sin, as it were, into the light, and shows it to ourselves in all its foulness. In this connexion it is worthy of notice that St. John does not say, "If we confess our sin," but "if we confess our sins"; that is, we are to tell them one by one to God, we are to conceal nothing—if we could—from Him, but as we kneel before Him we are to lay the secrets of our heart, bad as they may be, all bare before Him. Such confession is never rendered without cost; it means pain and humiliation, and it is itself a sure sign and proof of the genuineness of sorrow for sin. And because that is so, it is followed by the most blessed consequences: first, the divine forgiveness, and next the divine cleansing.

1 John i. 8–10.

But what is the meaning of the remarkable expression, "He is righteous to forgive"? The former word, "faithful" to forgive, we can understand, for it reminds us of God's own precious promise of pardon, which He never breaks, but

God "Righteous to Forgive."

1 John i. 8–10.

to which He is ever "faithful"; but what is the meaning of God being "righteous to forgive"? Merciful or gracious to forgive, we could understand, but why "righteous to forgive"? The answer to this question will lead us into the heart of the Gospel, and will be better given when we come to the meaning of the great word "propitiation," a few verses further on; but here it may at once be said that God's forgiveness of the penitent sinner is more than merciful, more than gracious, it is a righteous pardon. He is as "righteous" in mercy as He is in judgment.

God Cleansing as well as Forgiving.

But God does even more than forgive, He cleanses as He forgives, and as His forgiveness is complete, leaving no unforgiven sin behind to trouble the conscience, so His cleansing is also complete, it is "from all unrighteousness." Both acts of God, as the Greek verbs indicate, are completed acts. The believer not only rejoices in the sweet assurance of perfect forgiveness, but he is also conscious that his personal character is cleansed and purified. As in Toplady's hymn, he can sing:

> "Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee,
> Let the water and the blood,
> From Thy riven side which flowed,
> Be of sin the double cure,
> Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

Sin, Confession, Pardon, Cleansing

Once more St. John returns to the error that he has been assailing; and these repeated references to it show how deeply rooted in the Church at Ephesus was this subtle, but most perilous denial of the reality of sin. This time, however, the apostle deals with the error under a somewhat different form. Before, he had referred to the denial of sin as a principle or power of evil within, "If we say we have no sin," now he deals with those who deny that they have personally sinned—"If we say that we have not sinned," that is, have not committed any definitely sinful acts; and that denial is even graver in its meaning and consequences than the former one. There is, in point of fact, a gradually ascending scale, the summit of which is reached here, as may be seen if we look at the successive stages in that climax, each one of which begins with the words "If we say."

1 John i. 8–10.

Stages in the Denial of Sin.

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (i. 6).

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (i. 8).

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (i. 10).

To "lie," to "deceive ourselves," and now last of all to "make God a liar," this is the final and most awful result of the denial of sin. It really

Its Culmination.

1 John i. 8–10.

makes God a liar, for that Gospel which is revealed in Christ is a Gospel of redemption from sin ; and to deny sin, therefore, is to deny the substance and to destroy the foundation of the Gospel of God. It is to "make Him a liar." It proves that the "Word" of God is not in us.

Even in these last words there is a distinct enlargement and strengthening of the evil results of the denial of sin. The apostle had already used the expression, "the truth is not in us"; now he says, bringing us more closely into the presence of the God whom such a denial affronts and dishonours, "His Word is not in us," the "Word" being more than the truth, for it is truth as spoken by a living Person ; it is that Gospel of the grace of God that was embodied in and uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ. That "Word" is "not in us," if we say that "we have not sinned."

Modern Views of Sin.

It is impossible not to see the application of these solemn words to many of those modern views of sin which are so prevalent to-day. When, for example, we are told there is "no sin against God which is not in some form or other a sin against man," that sin is "selfishness in human relations," that "sin has never injured God except through man," that "it is the God within who is injured by it rather than the God without," that "the imperfection of the finite

creation is not man's fault, but God's will," and much more to the same effect, one wonders what St. John would have said to such statements, if he were living now. Certainly, to the present writer at all events, they seem, indeed, to approach perilously near to the denial of sin as an offence against God, the guilt of which in every age has been the burden on the heart of the penitent sinner whose wrongdoing to his fellow-man was swallowed up in the more terrible sense of his wrongdoing to God. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight."

1 John i. 8–10.

VII

OUR ADVOCATE AND PROPITIATION

1 JOHN ii. 1, 2

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous :

2 And He is the propitiation for our sins : and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

1 John ii. 1, 2.

THERE is no real break between the last verse of the first chapter and the first two verses of the second, for in the latter St. John goes on to complete what he has to say about sin.

A Personal Appeal.

It will be noticed that he begins with a peculiarly tender and affectionate mode of address, "My little children," and that from this point onward the apostle, as a rule, leaves the plural and more general pronoun "we," and uses the personal and singular pronoun "my" or "I."

—Its Purpose.

"My little children," he says, "these things write I unto you, in order that ye may not sin" ; this was the whole purpose and aim of all that he had hitherto written ; and, lest any should be disheartened or despair in ever reaching so high

an ideal, he adds "if any man sin"—the Greek sense implying some definite act of sin—"we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." It is one of the many illustrations this epistle affords of the apostle's delicacy of feeling that in this last sentence he drops the pronoun "he," which would have been the natural one to have used after the "if any man" that had preceded it, and adopts the first personal pronoun, so as to include himself as amongst those who would sin, and would therefore need the great Advocate to plead for them. 1 John ii. 1, 2.

The word here rendered "Advocate" is the same word that is uniformly rendered "Comforter" in the Gospel of St. John (*cf.* John xiv. 16, 26; xv. 26; xvi. 7), and is only found in these five passages in the whole of the New Testament. The term is literally "Paraclete," and means one called to the side of another, with a view of taking his part or pleading his cause, or in some way supporting or aiding him. The word "advocate" is really the Latin rendering of the Greek word "paraclete," and gives the best possible meaning to the word. The Paraclete.

The Christian has really two Advocates, one within him, and one without him. It is of the former "Advocate" our Lord spoke, the Holy Spirit, when He told His disciples, "I will pray Our Advocate Within.

1 John ii. 1, 2.

the Father and He shall give you another Comforter," "another Advocate," and it is to this gracious work of the Holy Spirit within the believer that St. Paul refers when he says, "The Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Our Advocate Without.

It is to the other "Advocate," the Advocate without, that St. John refers. He says the Christian who sins has one all-prevailing plea even in his sin, he has an "Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The names given to the great Advocate, "Jesus"—His human name—and then "Christ"—His name as the Anointed Saviour of mankind—and last of all the words "the righteous," point to the fulness and completeness of His qualifications as the Advocate for the sinner before God. He pleads for him first because He Himself is man, one with the sinner in the common human nature. He pleads for him next as the Anointed Messiah, the Saviour of the world; and He pleads last of all as one who has a right to plead, for He is "Jesus Christ the righteous," and, as Bede remarks (quoted by Dr. Plummer), "a righteous advocate does not undertake unrighteous causes."

Our Lord as our Advocate.

This unseen work of our Lord is too often forgotten even by Christian people themselves, and it is worth while for a few moments to dwell

on it. We speak of "the finished work of Christ," as if all that our Lord had to do was completed when He died on the cross. In a very real and true sense the death of Jesus was the completion of His work, as He Himself declared when He cried, "It is finished," for the one sacrifice for the sin of the whole world, the Great Atonement for human sin, was then completed. But in another and equally true sense Christ's work was not finished on the cross—indeed, it would be far more true to say that it really began when He died. A great part of the Epistle to the Hebrews is devoted to setting forth the exaltation and glorification of Jesus in heaven, as the Great High Priest who has entered into heaven, "now to appear before the face of God for us," and who, we are told, "ever liveth"—so the words literally are—"in order to make intercession for us." In the unseen and eternal world He pursues the same blessed work of infinite love that brought Him to earth—the salvation of the sinner, the seeking and saving the lost. We have, as St. John here says, "An Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

1 John ii. 1, 2.

A Work Finished.

—And a Work Begun.

And now we come to the next words, which take us into the Holy of Holies of the Heavenly Temple, and reveal to us the greatest element in the intercessory work of Christ. "And He is

Our Lord as the Propitiation for our Sins.

1 John ii. 1, 2.

the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

This is one of the greatest verses in the New Testament, and deserves our careful study. It is a new thought added to what had been already said of Christ as our "Advocate," for an advocate rarely, if ever, offers any propitiation for the offender for whom he pleads, least of all, does he offer himself; but Christ, we are told, is more than our "Advocate," He is our "Propitiation" as well; indeed, it is the fact that He is the great propitiation for human sin that makes it possible for Him to be the Great Advocate for the sinner with "the Father."

The Word "Propitiation."

But what is the real and essential significance of the word "propitiation"? The word itself as a substantive only occurs twice in the New Testament—here and in chap. iv. 10—but the corresponding verb is found twice in the New Testament, once in Luke xviii. 13, and again in Hebrews ii. 17; whilst a closely allied substantive is found also twice in the New Testament, in Romans iii. 25, and in Hebrews ix. 5. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament these words are frequently found, and generally refer to some specific action by which sin has been expiated, or covered, or atoned for. Dr. Plummer quotes two very suggestive and remarkable

instances of this use of the word. In Numb. v. 8 "the ram of the atonement," as it is in our version, is in the Greek translation the "ram of the propitiation," the same word as St. John uses here; and in Psalm cxxx. 4, "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared," is in the Greek, "Before Thee is the propitiation." 1 John ii. 1, 2.

It is not often one ventures to differ from so profound and saintly a scholar as the late Bishop Westcott, but when he says that the Scriptural conception of "to propitiate" is not that of "appeasing one who is angry," "but of altering the character of that which from without occasions a necessary alienation"—in other words, that propitiation has reference to its influence on man, and not on God—it is certainly difficult to see how such a meaning of the word either accords with its use in the New Testament, or can possibly be reconciled with this passage in this epistle by St. John. St. John says Christ is the "propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world"; that is, in some way Christ offers the great expiation or atonement for humanism; it is in respect of sin, and of sin alone, as the preposition "for our sins" signifies, that His propitiatory work is conducted. Bishop Westcott's View.

As there is a danger of robbing our Lord's intercessory work of all its objective reality and Our Lord's Work a True Propitiation.

1 John ii. 1, 2.

significance, so there is a danger of taking away the reality of His propitiatory sacrifice for sin. It is said that "God is Love, and needs no propitiation," whereas what St. John teaches is this, that "God is Love, and therefore provides the propitiation." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." So far from propitiation and love being irreconcilable, propitiation itself is the work of love. Mercy and justice are only the other names for the love that provides the propitiation, and for the propitiation, that is, the homage love renders to righteousness. It is because Christ is Himself the propitiation that He can plead and does plead for sinners with a plea that is a righteous plea for them, the plea of one who is "Jesus Christ the righteous"; and it is because that righteous plea is accepted by God that He is "righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The one ever-prevailing plea of the penitent sinner is not what he is, or has done, or can do in expiation of his sin, but what Christ is and has done for him, that He has stood in his place, has borne his condemnation on the cross, that the judgment due to his sin has rested on Him, that He died for him, and that now in the presence of the Father he has an Advocate

—And a Work of Love.

—For the Sinner's Benefit.

who can plead and does plead for him because He is also "the propitiation" for his sins. **1 John ii. 1, 2.**

Reconciling Justice and Mercy.

We never reach the teaching of the New Testament concerning sin until we realise that sin affects God as well as man, that God has to deal with it as an offence against Himself, and that the wonder and glory of His love are, that He has dealt with sin in His own dear Son, who is the revelation at once of infinite love and infinite righteousness, and that in Him "mercy and truth have met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

An Eternal Work.

This is not all that is taught in this great passage. We must not overlook the present tense St. John uses, "He is the propitiation for our sins." The power and virtue of Christ's sacrifice never alters. There is no past and no future in the Cross, for its efficacy is eternally present. Just as the precious Blood "cleanseth" —is always cleansing—"from all sin," so the great propitiation is ever pleading, ever working for human sin. The work of Christ never grows old. It is an eternal reality.

A World-wide Work.

And then, last of all, there are the closing words, that "Christ is the propitiation, not for our sins only but also for the whole world." St. John emphasises the universality of the sacrifice and of the propitiation of the Saviour. God loved

1 John ii. 1, 2.

"the world," Christ prayed that "the world might believe" that God had "sent Him," Christ was "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world," "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," and Christ "is the propitiation" "for the whole world." On the cross there was written in Hebrew, and in Latin, and in Greek, the three languages of the then civilised world—the language of religion, the language of empire, and the language of thought—the inscription that declared the Kingship of Jesus. His world-wide dominion rests on the world-wide efficacy of the sacrifice for sin. He is the King of man because He is the great High Priest for all mankind, His Cross is His Throne. He is for ever the "propitiation for the world."

The Basis of the Lord's Dominions.

On this great and precious truth all the missionary work of the Church rests. If it be true that Christ is the one propitiation for the whole world, we dare not—we cannot keep that truth to ourselves—

> "Christ for the world we sing,
> The world to Christ we bring"—

and one day "the kingdoms of the world shall become the Kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."

VIII

KNOWLEDGE AND OBEDIENCE

1 JOHN ii. 3–6

3 And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

4 He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him.

6 He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.

1 John ii. 3–6. The Argument.

WITH the third verse of this second chapter we enter on a new development of the main theme of the first half of this epistle. Fellowship with God, Who is light, is not an unreal abstraction, not even an angelical communion beyond all possibility of verification, it is a communion that may be proved and ought to be proved by the most real and practical of all tests, the conduct of the life. Obedience to the commandments of God is the one unfailing proof of the

1 John ii. 3–6.

knowledge of God, and especially obedience to the supreme law of love. This, in brief, is a summary of the teaching of the apostle in this new section of this epistle, and it will repay us to study it more closely, especially as there are several interesting and some difficult questions which will arise in the course of our study, and to which we must endeavour to find an answer.

The Tenses.

The tenses in the third verse are full of meaning. First of all we have a present tense—"we know," for the experience to which the apostle now appeals is not a past experience, it is a present reality, "confirmed," as Bishop Westcott says, "from moment to moment in the actual course of life." Then we have the perfect tense, rendered in our version by the present, it is true—"that we know Him." But it is really far more than a present tense, for it means, "we have known in the past, and still know," or, as it might correctly be rendered, "we have come to a knowledge of Him."

"Know" and "Knowledge."

Nor is the word St. John uses for this knowledge of God without its own special meaning. There are two words in the Greek New Testament which are rendered by the same English word to "know." One is the word found, for

example, in Rev. ii. 2—"I know thy works," which implies an immediate and absolute knowledge; the other is the word used all through these verses, which implies knowledge that has been gained by successive experience. We "know that we have come to a knowledge of Him through the experience of the past" is not an incorrect paraphrase of the apostle's words. But, as has been already said, the one proof and test of the reality of our knowledge of God must be found in the keeping of His commandments. 1 John ii. 3–6.

Those Gnostic teachers at Ephesus, to whom reference has already been made, declared intellectual enlightenment, as interpreted by themselves, to be everything, and completely divorced knowledge from life. The initiated into the hidden mysteries of knowledge were by that fact alone possessors of the divine life. The apostle exposes the hollowness and worthlessness of this claim. Simply to say we know God is a delusion and a lie, unless the life answers to the profession. Intellectual assent is only of value when it is tested and proved by the obedience of the life. **Knowledge and Obedience.**

And this keeping of the commandments of God is to be, as the word the apostle uses signifies, not a mere perfunctory guarding our- **—Watchfully joined.**

1 John ii. 3–6.

selves against disobedience, but a living, watchful observance of the laws of God, an observance both of the letter and of the spirit of the commandments of God. In the true believer his knowledge of God and his daily life are inseparably united. For, St. John goes on to say, the life speaks as well as the lips. "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," or, in the emphatic words of the original, "in this man the truth is not." It is characteristic of the apostle that he does not hesitate to use the strongest and most severe language of this false profession; he says the man who makes it is a "liar." The apostle is generally regarded, and rightly regarded, as the Apostle of Love, but there are no fires so fierce and so terrible as the fires of love, for they consume all falsity and unreality in their devouring heat.

The Witness of the Life.

It may be well for us to pause here for one moment, and to remind ourselves that it is just as true to-day as it was in the time of the apostle, that the only way of showing we are servants of God is by the obedience of the daily life. It is useless, as the late Dr. Binney once said, "to profess cream and to practise skim milk." Our Lord Himself has taught us

that it is "by their fruits" we are to know the true from the false professor of religion, and that only those who "do the will" of the Father will "enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." 1 John ii. 3–6.

In contrast with these false pretenders to the knowledge of God is the character of the true servant of God. It is, perhaps, not without meaning that here we have no reference to any boasted claim to the knowledge of God, but the opposition to this vain assertion is simply stated in the impressive contrast of the life—"Whoso keepeth His word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected." —The True Servant's Proof.

The "word" of God is a larger and richer expression than even the commandments of God, for it includes not only those specific injunctions which are contained in the law of God, but the whole revelation of the will of God, and it suggests the utterance of that will by the lips of a living person. So large and rich is this obedience of the true Christian that St. John does not hesitate to say that it implies the perfecting of the love of God. The Keeping of the Word.

Much discussion has been raised on the question as to whether the phrase, "the love of God," means the love of God to us, or our love to God, some expositors taking the one view and others the other; but surely the indefinite- The Perfecting of Love.

1 John ii. 3–6.

ness and largeness of the phrase may be meant purposely to suggest both of these interpretations to us, and the more so, as they are indissolubly connected. Our love to God is the fruit and result of His prior love to us, and the fuller apprehension of the divine love always leads to the fuller response of the human heart to that love. The main lesson, however, of this passage is the practical one, that daily obedience to all that is contained in "the word" of God is at once the sign and the proof of the fuller apprehension of the love of God.

The Christian Ideal.

It will be noted later on in our exposition of this epistle, when we come to St. John's teaching about the impossibility of the believer committing sin, that the apostle loves to deal with the ideal states of the Christian life, just as a mathematician in his definitions deals with ideal figures towards which the actual figures only approximate. We have an illustration of this habit of the apostle in the words now before us. No Christian does actually keep the whole word of God, and in no Christian is either the apprehension of the divine love or his love to God perfect; but this is the ideal, and just so far as the obedience of the life is rendered is the ideal reached. The perfection of love is always in proportion to the completeness of obedience, and

the completeness of obedience to the perfecting of love. 1 John ii. 3–6.

Knowledge and Imitation.

And now the apostle comes to a fresh application and illustration of the truth he is enforcing. The reality of our knowledge of God and of our possession of the divine life is shown not only in our daily obedience, but is still further to be manifested in the imitation of the example of Christ—"Hereby know we that we are in Him: he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked." One cannot but note the reminiscence these words contain of Christ's own teaching, as contained in the closing chapters of the Gospel of St. John, and especially in that great discussion contained in the fifteenth chapter on "abiding in Christ."

A Climax.

There is, moreover, as Bengel acutely notices, a climax reached in the last words. First we have "to know Him" (ver. 3), next to be "in Him" (ver. 5), and now last of all we have to "abide" in Him. Not once has Christ's name been mentioned since its occurrence in the second verse, but instead, nine times repeated, we have had the pronouns of the third person, "he," "him," "his," as if it were wholly unnecessary for the writer to indicate to whom he is referring. There was only one Name "above every name," and there was no need to tell his

1 John ii. 3–6.

readers that it was only of Him he was writing.

There are several important suggestions of these words which deserve careful attention..

The Appeal to Known Facts.

First of all they bring us back again to the solid ground of historical fact. St. John assumes, without a single word of explanation, that his readers were all familiar with the story of Christ's human life.

"As He walked" would have no meaning to one who had never heard of the life of Jesus on earth, and so we are again reminded that our Christian path is not a bright vision in the clouds, but is a faith that reposes on actual facts, seen and verified in a human life.

The One Example Indicated.

Then, again, we are reminded that the example of Christ is the one model we have to imitate. We ought "to walk even as He walked." The late Mr. John Stuart Mill, in his *Essay on Religion*, speaking of the example the life of Christ affords, admits that Christ is "the ideal representative and guide of humanity," and then adds the remarkable words, "nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life."[1]

[1] *Essay on Religion*, p. 255.

Knowledge and Obedience

1 John ii. 3–6. —An Example for All.

It is almost a commonplace of our faith that Christ is the great example we have to follow, but how seldom do we realise what this involves! Is there any other human life that has ever been lived that all men alike could follow? The rich may be an example to the rich, the poor to the poor, the learned to the learned, the old to the old, and the young to the young, and so on, but the limitations of the life are even more manifest than its breadth. The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, is without limits. He is as much an example to the rich man as to the poor man, to the ignorant as to the cultivated, to the old as to the young, to this restless, eager age as to the quiet ages which have gone by; He is of all ages, for He is of none, and all temperaments, all classes, all positions find in Him the one fair ideal of humanity. Even the final separation of sex does not divide men and women from Christ, for both discover in Him the perfect ideal of their one human life. The life of Christ is still the one faultless picture of what our life ought to be.

Our Obligation.

Nor should we pass by without notice the little word "ought" in the sixth verse. There are two words implying obligation which are in the New Testament; one that may be rendered "must," and that generally implies compulsion or

1 John ii. 3–6.

constraint; the other rendered, as in this verse, by "ought," that has no hint of any constraint, but rather of a personal duty willingly discharged. The force and meaning of this word as applied to the Christian's obligation to follow the example of his Lord will be readily perceived. He "ought to walk even as He walked," but there is no irresistible compulsion on him to do so; he is left free; but none the less a divine obligation, to which he has willingly to yield, is laid on him to follow his Lord's example.

Our Progress.

Then, again, these words remind us of the great truth that has already been noted in the seventh verse of the first chapter, that our Christian life is never really stationary, is never at rest, but is an endless progression; it is a "walking," just as Christ's life was a "walking." The onward progress of the believer, blessed be God! never ceases, for he walks on "the way everlasting."

The Positive Ideal of Christian Morality.

Last of all, these words of the apostle are the best possible answer to those who complain of the Christian morality as being too negative in form. John Stuart Mill, for example, whom I have quoted, says:—"The ideal of Christian morality is negative rather than positive, passive rather than active . . . in its precepts 'thou shalt not' predominates unduly over 'thou

shalt.'"[1] One wonders, as one reads these words, if Mill ever remembered that the one ideal human life held up for all Christians to imitate is the life of Him whose life was summed up in the words, "He went about doing good." 1 John ii. 3–6.

[1] *Liberty*, chap. 3.

IX

THE OLD YET NEW COMMANDMENT

1 John ii. 7–11

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

1 John ii. 7–11. Obedience Illustrated.

THE apostle now passes from the general statement that the knowledge of God always issues in obedience to His will in keeping His commandments, to a specific and practical illustration of this obedience to the great law of love, that law which sums up and comprehends all other laws. He begins by using for the first time the expression "Beloved." ("Brethren" in

the A.V. is not the true reading.) While about to enforce the great law of love, the apostle gives expression to his love for the brethren. 1 John ii. 7–11.

This commandment, as contained in the law of love, is old and yet new. "No new commandment," St. John says, "write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard." There are two entirely different Greek words which are both rendered by the same English word "new" in our version, but which have a quite distinct meaning. One is "new" in the sense of "fresh," to use the happy rendering given to the word by the Archbishop of Armagh; the other is "new" in order of time, that is, recent. The former is the word used here. The apostle is not urging on his hearers a commandment that was entirely new and fresh, but one that he himself from the first had taught them. They had heard it "from the beginning" in the "word" he had spoken to them. And yet, in another and equally true meaning of the words, it was a "new commandment"; and, as if still further to emphasise this side of the truth, the apostle adds, "Which thing is true in Him and in you." —In the Fresh Commandment.

In what sense was this commandment of love, which was not a "novel" commandment, really How the Old Commandment was New.

1 John ii. 7-11.

new and fresh? Three replies have been given to this question. The commandment of love, it is said, was "new," inasmuch as God Himself daily renews obedience to it, so that it never grows old; or it was "new," in the sense that the apostle urges it, as if for the first time, on his disciples; or lastly—and this appears beyond all doubt to be the true answer—this commandment of love was "new," in that it was first of all enjoined by Christ Himself on His disciples.

—As Enjoined by Christ.

There can be little doubt, I think, that there is a reference to Christ's own words spoken to the apostles on the eve of His Passion—"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another" (John xiii. 34). And this interpretation affords the best key to the words which immediately follow, "Which thing is true in Him," for the commandment as declared by Christ was a "new" commandment both in its form and in its authority. He Himself illustrated and embodied the great law of love in His own life. There, for the first time, from the lips and in the life of Christ, one heard and saw this "new" commandment.

—As Shown in His Life.

—As Practised by Disciples.

But St. John goes on to add that the "newness" of this commandment can be seen not only in Christ, but in themselves, for he adds,

"which thing is true . . . in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth." "You, too," St. John says, if one may paraphrase his words and meaning, "are yourselves living proof of the 'newness' of this commandment. Once you lived in the darkness, that darkness in which all who hate their brothers walk, but now the darkness is already passing away, and the true light shining, inasmuch as you have already begun to learn the great lesson of love." It is worthy of notice that the word rendered "true," "the true light," is not the same word rendered "true" in the eighth verse. That was "true" as "opposite to lying," this is true as "opposed to spurious" (Plummer *in loc.*). Christ Himself is the "true Light," the only real and absolute light, just as He called Himself "the true Bread" (John vi. 32), and "the true Wine" (John xv. 1). In the opening words of the Gospel of St. John we have the first statement of the truth that St. John here repeats, "There was the true light . . which lighteth every man, coming into the world" (John i. 9). **1 John ii. 7–11.**

The obedience of the disciples, however, to this law of love, real as it was, was not yet perfect. The full radiance of that blessed love had not yet illuminated their hearts and lives. —Though with an Imperfect Obedience.

1 John ii. 7–11.

The darkness had not yet entirely gone; it was "passing away"; but the "true light" was already "shining," so that this beginning of the perfect law of love was like the early dawn itself, the promise and the prophecy of the coming of the perfect day.

The Dwellers in Darkness.

And now, once again, the apostle deals with those who profess, but who do not possess, the truth of God. Four times before he has spoken of these false professors (*cf.* chap i. 6, 8, 10; and chap ii. 4), and now for the fifth time he pronounces his judgment on them. "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now." This statement is more fully expanded in the eleventh verse—"He that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes."

Evil Progressive.

Six times over St. John has emphasised the individual and specific character of evil by calling it "the darkness." Evil is a unity as well as goodness; in other words, all sin is embodied in a central source of sin—"the evil one," just as all goodness finds its one form and source in God. And evil as well as goodness is never stationary. We may go backward as certainly as we may go forward. He that hateth his brother

is not only "in the darkness," but he "walks in the darkness," passing step by step into the ever-thickening gloom, with the result that he "knows not where he is going." Whosoever walks in the night is sure not to be able to see his way, or to see where the way ends, and the man who hates his brother is in utter ignorance of the awful end of his life. He cannot see, for "the darkness hath blinded his eyes." 1 John ii. 7–11.

In these last words the terrible description of the false professor of religion and of all who hate their brother reaches its climax. "The darkness" has not merely impeded or dimmed his vision, it has destroyed his vision. Sin, and especially the deepest and darkest sin of hatred, renders that man incapable of seeing either the way on which he is walking, or the end to which he is going. The most dreadful doom of sin in this world is that it makes a man unconscious of sin. There are some, alas! who, to use St. Paul's terrible words, are "past feeling" (Eph. iv. 19, "*Verbum significantissimum*," Bengel). The Climax.

In happy contrast to the condition and final doom of him who hates his brother are the state and blessedness of him who fulfils the law of love and "loveth his brother." He is not only "in the light," but he "abideth in the light"; The Dwellers in Light.

1 John ii. 7–11.

his position is stable and assured, for the life of love is like a home in which a man lives and "abides." And not only so, but "there is none occasion of stumbling in him." I take these words in their largest meaning, first as referring to the man himself who loves his brother and walks in the light. He, unlike the man who walks in the darkness, who is in danger of stumbling at every step (*cf.* John xi. 10), is in no such peril. He walks safely and surely just because he is walking in the light (*cf.* John xi. 9).

But more than this, he not only does not stumble himself, but he gives no occasion of stumbling to his brother, for love never wilfully does anything that would injure one's brother. As St. Paul says, it does not put "a stumbling-block or an occasion of falling" in his brother's way.

The Clear Distinction.

The last point is worthy of notice. It will be noted that all through these deep and wonderful verses a succession of contrasts has been found, stated in all their sharpness and definiteness. Light—darkness; a liar—the truth; and now love—hatred. There is no such thing as neutrality in life. There can be no twilight in the spiritual world, where it is partly light, partly dark. We are walking either on the narrow way or on the broad path. We are either among

the sheep or the goats. We must take sides, and there are only two sides we can take—either for God, or for the evil one; we are walking either in the light or in the darkness. We must be either for Christ or against Him; we cannot be neutral. 1 John ii. 7–11.

X

THE BELIEVER AND THE WORLD

1 John ii. 12–17

12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him *that is* from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him *that is* from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

15 Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

1 John ii. 12–17. A Pause.

"HITHERTO," Bishop Westcott says in his commentary, "St. John has stated briefly the main scope of his epistle. . . . He now pauses, as it were, to contemplate those whom he is addressing more distinctly and directly, and to gather

up in a more definite form the charge which is at once the foundation and the end of all he writes." This "pause" in the epistle is manifest to any careful reader, and extends from the twelfth to the fourteenth verse. After this the last word in the solemn charge the apostle gives to those to whom he is writing—"the evil one" in ver. 14—leads him to go on to warn his readers against the two most serious perils to which they were exposed—worldliness and the power of Antichrist. This warning extends, with a slight digression, as far as the close of ver. 28, after which a new section of the epistle begins. 1 John ii. 12–17.

Before attempting any detailed consideration of these verses, two or three remarks which concern the opening words have to be made. First of all, the Greek word translated "little children" in ver. 12 is not the same word that is similarly rendered in ver. 13. There is a slight but not unimportant difference between the two terms. The first emphasises the thought of kinship, the second the idea of subordination; the first term is the language, as it were, of one nearly related to them to whom he is speaking; in the second the words are those of one placed in a position of authority, the authority due to age and experience, over them. The Words.

Next, there is an important change of tense The Tenses.

1 John ii. 12–17.

to be made in the translation of the Authorised Version at the close of ver. 13; the change, it will be noted, is made in the Revised Version. Instead of reading "I write," it ought to read "I have written," thus preserving the balance and symmetry of the whole passage. Three times the apostle says "I write," and three times he says "I have written." There has been considerable difference of opinion amongst commentators as to the true significance of this change from the present to the past tense. The most probable explanation is that the former refers to the present epistle—the letter that St. John was then engaged in writing—whilst the latter refers to the gospel that he had already written, and to which the epistle is the sequel.

The Three Classes of Readers.

So, too, there has been some doubt as to the exact meaning of the three classes St. John here addresses, "little children," "fathers," "young men"; but the general consensus of the best opinion is that under the first title the apostle addresses all the believers to whom this letter was sent, whilst under the next two he regards them in their differences of age, as older and younger.

To the Children:—"Your Sins are Forgiven."

St. John begins by stating the fundamental experience of the Christian life, the forgiveness of sins. "I write unto you, little children, be-

cause your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." Here we touch the central reality of the Gospel of the grace of God. We are forgiven "for Christ's sake." The New Testament never once varies on this point, and St. Paul summed up the Gospel he preached in the words, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The death of Christ is the one and only ground on which God remits human sin, but it is, blessed be God, the sufficient ground. 1 John ii 12–17.

It may be asked, however, whether faith is not also necessary to the forgiveness of sin. To this it may be answered that faith is necessary as the *condition*, but is not the *cause*, of forgiveness. The difference between the cause and the condition of any result can be made clear in a moment. —For Christ's Sake.

If I am ill, and the doctor prescribes for me some medicine that he tells me will cure my disease, that medicine, if I take it, will be the cause of my recovery; but my taking it will be the condition. It is not a little significant and suggestive that in that careful statement of the truth so characteristic in the New Testament it uniformly distinguishes between the cause and the condition of our forgiveness. The Greek preposition διὰ with a genitive case following it always introduces a condition, not a cause; The Office of Faith.

1 John ii. 12–17.

whereas with an accusative case following, it always means a cause, and not a condition. Accordingly, the New Testament never once says that we are justified on the ground of, because of, our faith, but only by means of our faith (*διὰ πίστεως*), whereas it always says we are justified because of His name's sake (*διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ*). St. John uses precisely the same expression in the verse before, as "Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (*διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ*).

Nor let us forget that this forgiveness of sins is a blessed and present reality. "Your sins are forgiven you," he assures them, "for His name's sake." We lose much of the joy and peace of the Christian life because, through our unbelief, we fail to realise that we are not only sinners but forgiven sinners in the sight of God.

"Another Gospel."

When we are told, in the present day, by some who preach "another Gospel which is not another," that the death of Jesus was "essentially the same as the death of any other good man in the service of truth and righteousness," that "Jesus died as Socrates died, as John Huss died," and so on, this, at least, is absolutely certain, that this is not the Gospel that the apostles preached and for which they lived and died. It will be a very long time before men

will believe that they are forgiven their sins because Socrates died or because John Huss died. They know they are forgiven because "Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. iii. 18). 1 John ii. 12–17.

From this general address St. John passes on to "the fathers," to whom he writes "because they have known Him who is from the beginning" —that is, of course, Christ Himself, as is manifest from the opening words both of this epistle and of the Gospel of St. John. But how did these early believers "know" Christ? They had never seen Him, never heard Him speak, yet St. John says they knew Him. The answer is plain, they knew Christ just as St. Paul says the Ephesian Christians had "heard" Christ (Eph. iv. 21). There is a knowledge deeper and truer than any knowledge that comes to us through our senses, the knowledge of the heart, the understanding, whose organ is not sense but faith; and that knowledge of Christ all they possess who believe on Him. They believe first, but faith passes into knowledge, and they "know whom they have believed." To the Fathers, who have known Christ.

Last of all St. John writes to the "young men," because they "have overcome the evil one." There are two points now worthy of To the Young Men, who have Overcome.

1 John ii. 12–17.

notice. First, there is a slight but subtle change of tense that is most suggestive. St. John says they "have overcome the evil one," the perfect tense indicating that the conflict and the victory had taken place in the past, but that their results remain, and are still their possession. Next, St. John announces the personality of the spirit of evil; he calls him "the evil one." It is one of the marks of the unbelief of the present day that it is unwilling to believe in the personality of the devil, and prefers to spell his name without its initial letter; but in the New Testament—our only possible guide in all that relates to the unseen world of spirits—the personality of the devil is everywhere declared. There is a "prince" of darkness as well as of light, a ruler in hell as well as in heaven.

Strength, and the Secret of Strength.

Now, as we have seen, the apostle suddenly changes the tense, and going back in thought to the gospel he had already written, he tells his readers why he had written that gospel. There are other changes made, as will be noticed by the careful reader, together with this change of tense. The "little ones" have been written to because they "knew the Father," the "fathers" are addressed as before, but the reason for his having written to the "young men" is amplified, "because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you."

Before they were only reminded of their strength, as they are reminded of the secret of that strength, the indwelling of "the Word of God"—that is, as the use of the expression in the New Testament almost uniformly implies, the evangelistic message, the Gospel of the grace of God. Of this "Word of the Lord" St. Peter says, "This is the Word of good tidings which was preached unto you." We are strong to "overcome the evil one" only as the Gospel of reconciliation, the Word of Christ, dwells in us. The Lord Jesus overcame the tempter by His use of the Word of God, the Old Testament, meeting each successive temptation by "It is written," and we have put into our hands "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Weakness or defeat in the great fight with "the evil one" is always due to our failure to use that Word. It was when John Bunyan's Pilgrim lost his roll that his danger and trouble began.

1 John ii. 12–17.

And then the apostle passes on to warn his "little children" against the first peril of the Christian life, the peril of worldliness. "Love not the world," he says, "neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." What is this "world" that we are forbidden to love? Does this command forbid a Christian to engage in

The Peril of Worldiness.

1 John ii. 12–17.

worldly pursuits or occupations, in political or commercial life, for example; does it interdict the love of art or the pursuit of science; does it make the acceptance of worldly rank and honour a sin? What answer can we make to these questions?

The Admissible Love of the World.

This, at least, is certain, that we may love the world in the same sense in which we are told "God loved the world," that is, the men and the women in the world. That love is never worldliness—nay, it is the antithesis to all the spirit of worldliness! Next, we are sure that as the material universe with its wonder and glory is God's own creation, it cannot be sinful to love what God Himself has created. And last of all—and here we shall come more closely to the question at issue—we have to live our human life in the world, and we cannot, therefore, avoid touching the world on every hand. To work for one's daily bread, to engage in business or commercial life, to take our part in the political life of the nation of which we form a part, is surely an inevitable result of having to live in the world. Nay! there is a reason, St. Paul tells us, in which "the world" itself is to be counted part of the possession of the Christian (1 Cor. iii. 22).

The Forbidden Love of the World.

Still the question remains to be answered, What is this "world" that we are forbidden to

love? *It is all this present order of finite and temporal existence without God.* Worldliness, in short, is not—as we are so prone to imagine—this thing or that thing; it is anything and everything, if God be left out. It is, as the apostle says, "all that is in the world," all human life, all human activities, all human pleasures, without God; and the specific illustrations that St. John gives of worldliness, "the lust of the flesh"—that is, those sensual desires which have their origin in the lower nature, "the flesh"; "the lust of the eyes"—that is, those evil desires which come to us through vision, whether it be the pursuit of a godless art or the baser delight in unclean sights; "the vainglory of life"—that is, the ostentation of wealth, or rank, or position, or power—these are only instances of typical worldliness, that is, of a life in which God has no place. Under all these diverse manifestations and expressions of worldliness one spirit is manifest, for there is a unity in evil as well as in goodness, and St. John hints at this evil unity when he says—and the singular number following the plural of ver. 15 is most impressive—"All that is in the world" is "not of the Father, but is of the world." 1 John ii. 12–17.

It will be seen that there is, therefore, nothing in the words to make it sinful for a Christian to take part in the common pursuits or business The Open Paths.

1 John ii. 12–17.

of life, or to pursue science, or to love art, or to be a politician or a statesman. All depends on the spirit in which the Christian lives his life. If he leaves God out of that life, he may be as worldly living in a cottage on a pound a week as the millionaire may be in his luxurious home; or, on the other hand, it is possible to be as unworldly in a palace as in a cottage, if God be first in the heart and the life, just as it is possible for a Christian man to be a great scientific explorer, or a great artist or a great statesman.

A Much-Needed Warning.

Never was this warning more needed than now. The Puritans may have gone to the extreme in proscribing many things as worldly which were wholly innocent; but the peril of the Church today is in the opposite extreme, in washing out all real meaning from this command, and in allowing itself many things in which God has no place. No doubt it is true that we cannot draw any artificial lines which shall separate the Church or the Christian from the world; but none the less there is to be a separation as real and as true as, only far deeper than, the separation that divides refinement and culture from boorishness and ignorance—in a word, the separation of the Christian from the world is to spring from within, and because it does, it will affect all that is without. The ideal of the Christian life is not

Separation from the World.

removal from the world—that would be impossible—but separation from it; he is to be in it, but not of it, as our Lord Himself prayed, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil one." **1 John ii. 12–17.**

In the next words the apostle gives one reason for this "dehortation"—to use a good old English word we have unfortunately lost—from the love of the world. It is a transient and vanishing world. "It is passing away," for its dissolution is already begun, "and the lusts thereof"; but, on the other hand, "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." The worldling may have, for a short season, "the pride of life" (*βίος*); the Christian is in possession of "eternal life" (*ζωή*), he has the secret of the life that is "life indeed" (1 Tim. vi. 19). **—A Fleeting World.**

XI

THE PERIL OF ANTICHRIST

1 John ii. 18–28

18 Little children, it is the last time : and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists ; whereby we know that it is the last time.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us ; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us : but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father : *but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

25 And this is the promise that He hath promised us, *even* the eternal life.

26 These *things* have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27 But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you : but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is

truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.

28 And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

1 John ii. 18–28.

"The Last Time."

ST. JOHN passes on to the second great peril to the Christian life—the peril of Antichrist. He begins by reminding his readers that it is "the last time," or rather "the last hour." But what does St. John mean by the "last hour" or "a last hour," for there is no definite article in the Greek? Considerable difference of opinion has arisen on this point, some maintaining that all that St. John signifies by the words is the Christian dispensation, the last, as it precedes the second advent of Christ; others strongly urging that the only possible meaning of the words is that period of time which was immediately before the second advent. In support of this latter view it has been pointed out that the apostles and the early Church undoubtedly looked for a speedy return of Christ to judgment, and that therefore the most natural interpretation of the words is the one first given.

—When is it?

Whichever view we may take does not affect the truth of St. John's words. For the time between the first and second advents, however prolonged that time may be, is in a very real sense the "last hour," the closing period in the

1 John ii. 18–28.

history of the world; whilst, on the other hand, it may fairly be said that St. John, by a very natural foreshortening of the time to elapse before the second advent took place, was right in calling his own age a "last hour," just as we might call the present time a "last hour."

Antichrist.

A more difficult question, however, is concerned with the warning that follows, and with the meaning of the term "Antichrist." The word itself is only found in the writings of St. John in the New Testament, twice in this chapter (vers. 18 and 22), once in the fourth chapter (iv. 3), and once in 2 John 7, and very different opinions have been held as to its significance.

—Person or Thing?

Some have maintained that "Antichrist" is a person, whilst others have urged that the word only represents those false doctrines which were current in St. John's time, and were taught by the heretical teachers to whom he has already referred in this chapter.

Person.

We shall best approach the true answer to the question at issue if we carefully examine what the apostle actually says about Antichrist. First of all, he says that "Antichrist cometh," not "shall come," as in the Authorised Version, for the verb is in the present, and not in the future tense. The coming of Antichrist is not confined to one advent, though it may culminate

thus, but is a continuous succession of comings. Next, St. John says, this coming has already begun. "Even now have there arisen many Antichrists." Our Lord Himself plainly foretold this appearance of Antichrists, although He did not use the same term that St. John here employs. Christ said, "Many shall come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and shall lead many astray. . . . There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. xxiv. 5, 24). If our Lord's words are to be taken as referring to the same hostile power as St. John designates by the term "Antichrist," there can be no doubt that Antichrist is a person or persons, and not merely false doctrines.

1 John ii. 18–28.

The next statement in this chapter strongly supports this view, for the apostle says, in ver. 22, that "the Antichrist"—for the definite article ought to be inserted here, and is wrongly left out in the A.V.—is "he that denieth the Father and the Son." This points, no doubt, to a person, but does not settle the question as to whether there is one great opposer of Christ and of the truth, termed "the Antichrist," or many who come under that designation.

—Or Persons.

One thing, however, is clear from St. John's

1 John ii. 18–28.

The Mark of Antichrist.

words, that Antichrist is always marked by one false doctrine—the denial of the incarnation of our Lord. "Who is the liar," St. John asks, "but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" And then he goes on to say that "the Antichrist is he that denieth the Father and the Son," and he explains how this double denial arises out of the single denial of the Christ of which he had just before spoken. "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also." (There is no reason for printing this second clause in italics, as is done in the A.V., as if it were spurious and doubtful. All the best MSS. contain it.) To deny the Son is more than the denial of the Son, it is the denial of the Father as well; for if there is no Son of God there can be no Father.

Antichrist and Gnosticism.

So far the reference of St. John's words seems clear. The Church at Ephesus, like all the early Churches in Asia Minor, was exposed to grave peril from Gnostic teachers, one of whose principal tenets, as we have seen, was the inherent evil of matter. This necessarily carried with it the denial of the incarnation; for if matter were absolutely bad, it is impossible to believe that the Son of God ever took upon Himself a human body. This is the denial that "Jesus was the Christ." Antichrist, therefore,

so far as the teaching of St. John goes, may be said to be a common term for all those false Gnostic teachers who taught a doctrine that denied the reality of the incarnation, and with it the reality of the Fatherhood of God. 1 John ii. 18–28.

Whether there will be one great false teacher, "the Antichrist," in whom all the false teaching and opposition of previous Antichrists are to be summed up and incarnated, is left doubtful, so far as this epistle is concerned. It is when we leave the teaching of St. John and come to that of St. Paul, in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, that the question assumes a new definiteness. A considerable number of the best expositors have held that in St. Paul's teaching concerning the "man of sin," the "son of perdition," in that epistle, he refers to the same great opponent of Christ that St. John designates by the term, "the Antichrist." In support of this view it is urged that even in the names given to these false teachers there is a similarity of meaning. One is "the Antichrist," the other is "he that opposeth" (*ὁ ἀντιχείμενος*); that the idea of Antichrist in St. John, that is, of a rival and hostile Christ, is found in St. Paul's description of "the man of sin," who "setteth himself forth as God"; that the appearance of the Antichrist and of the man of sin is in each case

St. Paul's Teaching.

—Compared with St. John's.

1 John ii. 18–28.

preceded by a great apostacy of nominal Christians (*cf.* 1 John ii. 19, and 2 Thess. ii. 3); that one is described as "a liar," the other as "a deceiver"; and finally, that both are connected in their appearance with the second advent. All these considerations, it is said, point unmistakably to the identification of "the man of sin" of 2 Thess. with "the Antichrist" of 1 John.

The Man of Sin Identified.

Assuming for the moment that this is so, a further question arises, What great anti-Christian power most nearly answers to St. Paul's description of "the man of sin"? To this question the present writer answers, without any kind of hesitation, the Papacy. It is a reply that, as Canon Mason has pointed out, has been given not only by Protestant interpreters, but by great Roman Catholic theologians as well. Gregory the Great, for example, held that the "final Antichrist will be a Bishop of Rome." Let the description of the "man of sin" St. Paul gives be compared with the developments and history of the Papacy, the divine honour given to "our Lord God the Pope," the formal assumption by the Pope of the divine attribute of infallibility, the description given by eminent prelates of Rome of the Papacy as "the third incarnation of the Deity," the "power and signs and wonders of falsehood," which are a part of Roman teaching, and, above

all, let the significant fact be noted, that as soon as "the one that restrained" the rise of "this man of sin," the Roman Empire, as all expositors are agreed, was "taken out of the way," the developments of the Papacy commenced. Let any one ponder all these considerations, and he will have little doubt that, as has been said, the Papacy, and the Papacy alone, is "the man of sin." 1 John ii. 18–28.

It is the force and weight of these considerations, however, which make me doubt whether "the Antichrist" of St. John and the "man of sin" of St. Paul are identical, for if the latter be, as we have seen there is good reason to believe, the Papal power, it is certainly not true that the Papacy has ever denied the incarnation, or "that Jesus is the Christ," as St. John says Antichrist does. Whatever false doctrine Rome teaches, whatever additions she has made to the "faith once for all delivered unto the saints," Rome has never yet denied the great Christian verities of the incarnation of our Lord. On the whole, therefore, it seems most probable that in St. John's teaching about "Antichrist" he has reference only to those Gnostic teachers who were one of the great perils to the Churches in Asia Minor. But Antichrist and the "Man of Sin" not Identical.

And now, in closing this great chapter, the

1 John ii. 18–28. The Believer's Safety

apostle points out to his readers the unfailing sources of safety they have in meeting and defeating all the perils by which they were surrounded. It is not a little interesting and suggestive to note that these sources of safety are yet manifold; all turn on the one word, a favourite word with St. John, and one he had learnt from the lips of his Lord, "abide." Six times over in these few verses does this word recur, although the recurrence and its great significance are partially hidden from the English reader of the Authorised Version by the unfortunate and altogether unwarranted change in the translation made in ver. 24, where one and the same Greek word is variously rendered "abide," "remain," and "continue." (In each case the Revised Version very properly has "abide.") If we carefully study these "abides," we shall realise the blessed and unfailing safeguard these early Christians had against all error, a safeguard which we have as well.

Truth abiding in us.

The truth, first of all, must "abide" in us. "Let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father." The truth and the life are ultimately one. Error is never the parent of life, but of death. The truth is always the

way to life. If the Word of God, the truth they had heard from the beginning, "abides" in them, it will lead to their abiding in the Son and in the Father, to their possession of, and fellowship with, the life of God.

An Anointing for us.

Next, they had an "anointing," as the apostle had already reminded them in ver. 20, which was itself the divine teacher of all truth, and this anointing "abides" in them. The terms in which St. John describes the results of this divine anointing are very startling, and impossible as it would appear to a superficial reader to be true. He says, first of all (ver. 20), "Ye know all things," and now he amplifies the statement into, "ye need not that any one teach you; but as His annointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie" (ver. 27).

An Unfailing Guide.

This is one of those apparently paradoxical statements which, as we shall see later on, the apostle loves, but which contain the deepest and most blessed truth. The believer in Christ has within himself the abiding of the Spirit of all truth. It is his teacher and guide, so that he is not dependent on any human teacher, not even on an apostle. Least of all were these early Christians dependent on these Gnostic teachers who professed to know the "depths" of God, for the truth. The promise of Jesus had been fulfilled

1 John ii. 18–28.

in their experiences. "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth"; and the fact that in every age since, and notwithstanding all minor differences, there has been a general consensus of belief in the Church as to the truth, is itself the most impressive commentary on the words of our Lord and of His apostle.

Christ as the Abode.

And now we come to the last solemn "abide," twice repeated. "Even as it taught you," St. John says, "abide" (the verb seems to be in the imperative) "in Him"; and then once again the exhortation is repeated in the next verse, "And now, my little children, abide in Him." This completes the believer's safety, as the truth, first of all, and next the Spirit of truth also abides in him, who himself is bidden to abide in Christ. If he does so, the blessed result will be that, when the Lord "shall be manifested, we"—St. John, it will be seen, associates himself with them to whom he is writing—"may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him."

Not Ashamed at His Coming.

"Shamed away from Him," is the more literal and vivid translation, "at His coming." That last word is most important. It is literally *parousia*, and does not again occur in any of St. John's writings. It is, however, frequently found elsewhere in the New Testament, and Bishop Westcott acutely remarks that "its single occur-

rence here, where it might easily have been omitted, in exactly the same sense as it bears in all the other groups of apostolic writings . . . is a signal example of the danger of drawing conclusions from the negative phenomena of the books of the New Testament" (Comm. *in loc.*). 1 John ii. 18–28.

With this great word, *parousia*, the first half of the epistle closes. It was the "blessed hope" of the early Church; it ought to be ours as well. The "manifestation" of our Lord in His glory at His second advent is the one "far-off divine event" to which not only "all creation" but the Church "moves." May God, in His infinite mercy, grant that when it comes we may not be "shamed away from Him at His coming!" The Blessed Hope.

XII

MARKS OF THE CHILD OF GOD

1 JOHN ii. 29–iii. 3

29 If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because they knew Him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.

1 John ii. 29–iii. 3. The Second Half of the Epistle.

VERSE 29 of chapter ii. is the end of the first and the beginning of the second half of this epistle, or perhaps it ought rather to be regarded as the link uniting the two halves together, for its last word (in the Greek), "begotten," leads naturally to the opening words of the third chapter.

Its Keynote —Love.

The first half of the epistle, as has already been remarked, has for its keynote "light," whereas the second half has for its keynote

"love." Dr. Plummer remarks this key-word "love" of this division of the epistle occurs in it "sixteen times as a substantive, twenty-five as a verb, and five times as a verbal adjective, 'beloved.'" We shall see more in detail, later on, how the whole of this latter half of the epistle revolves, as it were, around one central thought, with its great issue, the revelation of the love of God in the redemption of the world by His Son. 1 John ii. 29–iii. 3.

A Mark of the Child of God.

The 29th verse states in general terms one of the distinguishing marks of the child of God— "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him." There is a change in the Greek in the verb translated by "know" in the second part of this verse, from that rendered "know" in the first part. It is, perhaps, a little difficult to represent this change accurately in English, for the first word means knowledge that is absolute and intuitive, whilst the second means knowledge that is gained by experience and observation; but this change of verb is very suggestive. We "know" that God in Christ is righteous with the most certain and indubitable knowledge, whereas we learn by experience the truth that all who do righteousness are "begotten of Him." Here again, as is so constantly the case in this epistle, the present tense the apostle

1 John ii. 29–iii. 3.

uses, "doeth righteousness," is full of meaning. It is not an isolated act of moral goodness that carries with it the proof of a heavenly birth, but it is the habitual practice of goodness, the "doing righteousness" daily, that is the sign we have been "begotten" of God. And yet even then, this constant righteousness of life is not the condition or cause of the divine sonship, it is its effect and result. Morality, however real and true, is never the root, but is always the fruit of the divine life.

Children of God and the Love of God.

St. John now passes on to a fuller statement of the position and privileges and hopes of the children of God, as a revelation of the infinite love of God to them. This whole section, extending to the close of the tenth verse, falls naturally into three divisions; first of all, the present position of privilege and honour of the children of God, next, their future glory, and last of all, their character as manifested amongst men.

Children and Sons.

Let us take each of these points in order. St. John begins with a note of astonishment at the love of God in making and calling sinful men His children. "Behold!" he says, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God." It is worthy of notice, let me say in passing, that the

word St. John uses here, and generally uses, and that is translated "children," is not the same Greek word constantly found in the epistles of St. Paul and translated "sons." St. Paul's word carries with it the idea of adoption and of privilege, whilst St. John's suggests the thought of the community of nature the children of God have with their Father, and consequently of their having been "begotten" of Him. John ii. 29–iii. 3.

But with each apostle the greatest revelation of the love of God, and the supreme purpose of the incarnation of His Son, is the restoration to man of that filial relation which he once held, but had lost through his sin. The genealogy of our Lord in the Gospel according to St. Luke ends thus: "The son of Adam, the son of God." The original relation of man to God was the filial; but as that relation was not physical, like human sonship, but was ethical and spiritual, it therefore could be destroyed, and was destroyed by sin. The loose and misleading statement, so often made in the present day, that all men are children of God, is not only opposed to the teaching of our Lord and of His apostles, but reveals a complete misapprehension of the only basis on which divine sonship can rest. We are children of God for the same reason that our children are ours, that is, because —Through the Love of God.

1 John ii. 29–iii. 3.

we share the divine nature, as they partake ours; and hence it is that men become children of God, not when they are born, but when they are "born again." "As many as received Him," we read, "to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12, 13). And completely in accordance with this, St. Paul says to the Galatians, "Ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus" (Gal. iii. 26).

The Purpose of Christ for the Children of God.

There can be no greater end, even for God, than the multiplication of His own character, and it is because the children of God share His nature that, as has been already said, the great purpose of the incarnation and redemption of Christ was to restore to fallen man his lost filial relation to God. Instead of sending forth the Son to judge and to condemn a sinful world, God sent Him forth that "we might receive the adoption of sons." It was the greatness of this love of God to man that filled St. John with wonder and amazement, and as if he could not refrain from again dwelling on the greatness and glory of this new filial relationship to God, he adds the words, "and such we are."

But this divine sonship involves, in our case,

as it did in Christ's, the absence of all recognition by the world. The "world" is wholly unspiritual, and how can it comprehend a spiritual relationship or a spiritual life? It did not when the Son of God was on earth; it does not with the sons of God to-day. It "knew Him not"; it "knoweth us not." The Christian life is always an unintelligible life to the worldling; and instead of the absence of recognition by the world being a trouble to the Christian, it ought to be a sure proof that he is not of the world. If he were, "the world would love his own."

1 John ii. 29–iii. 3. Its Consequences.

Now we are "children of God," but this present position of privilege and of honour is not all. There is to be a yet more wonderful revelation of the glory of this divine sonship. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested"—this, in my judgment, is far preferable to "if it shall be manifested"—"we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is."

—Privileges and Honours.

The late Bishop of Durham records an incident that is the best commentary on these words. A missionary was engaged, with the help of a native teacher, who also was a Christian, in translating this First Epistle of St. John into the language of the people amongst whom he laboured. But when he came to these words, "We shall be like

1 John ii. 29–iii. 3.

Him," the scribe laid down his pen and said, "No; I cannot write these words, it is too much; let us write, 'We shall kiss His feet.'" But it is not "too much" for the love of God.

The Glorious Future.

The future of the believer is even more wonderful and glorious than his present. He is to be made "like" Christ, because he will "see Him as He is." If the vision of Christ, even though His glory be only reflected as from "a mirror," transforms us now "into the same image" (2 Cor. iii. 18), what will be the effect of beholding the unveiled glory of the Lord? Here His Godhead is only partially revealed to His disciples; there the Godhead and the manhood—or rather the Godhead in the manhood—will be fully manifested, and, according to Christ's own prayer for His disciples, they will "behold His glory" (John xvii. 24), and the result of this beatific vision will be their complete transformation into the likeness of the Lord. In every part of their being, in body and in soul and in spirit, they will be "like Him."

—Not yet "Manifest."

This is the glory of the future that lies before every believer in Christ; but it is not yet made "manifest." Not till Christ comes the second time, "to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed" (2 Thess. i. 10), will this unspeakable blessedness be theirs,

and this is one reason for the Second Advent of the Lord being called the "blessed hope" of the Church. 1 John ii. 29–iii. 3.

The Power of this Hope.

How much, in these latter days, the Church has lost of joy and comfort through the gradual fading away of this hope from its consciousness and faith, it is impossible to say; but the next words of the apostle tell us how much we lose in inspiration and power in our daily life if this hope be gone. "Every one that hath this hope set on Him"—"in Him" is a mistaken and weakened rendering of St. John's words—"purifieth himself even as He is pure."

The Secret Spring of Personal Holiness.

The hope of the Second Advent is not a visionary dream without power over the daily life; it is the greatest of all powers, for it is the secret spring of all personal purity and holiness. The believer who looks forward to seeing his Lord "as He is," and to being then made "like Him," will not and cannot wait for that great day for the great transformation to begin; it will begin now and here. And the same great ideal is before him now that will be attained then; for as nothing short of likeness to his Lord will be his glory at His appearing, so now he will "purify himself" with this high standard ever before him, "even as He is pure."

Christ, let it be noted, is never said to purify

1 John ii. 29–iii. 3.

Himself. He "is pure," or as we read in the next verse but one, "in Him is no sin," or, in the more impressive and emphatic order of the Greek, "sin in Him there is not"; and it is this perfect and flawless purity of our Lord that makes Him at once the great example and the great inspiration of our lives.

XIII

THE BELIEVER AMONGST MEN

1 JOHN iii. 4–9

4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law.

5 And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin.

6 Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

HAVING dwelt on the present position of the believer as a child of God, and of his future glory as being made like to Christ, the apostle closes this section of his epistle with a solemn and detailed statement of the character the believer must bear in the world and amongst men. One sentence may, perhaps, sum up the teaching of St. John on this subject; as the

1 John iii. 4–9.

1 John iii. 4–9.

believer has before him the hope of complete likeness to his Lord, so here on earth he is to be marked by holiness of character and life.

Sin as Defying God.

The apostle begins by tracing sin to its root. "Every one that doeth sin"—note again the present tense, implying the habitual practice of sin—"doeth also lawlessness: and sin is lawlessness." The twice-repeated word "lawlessness" emphasises the darkest guilt and "sinfulness" of sin. It is disobedience to the perfect and holy law of God; it is the defiant aversion of the human will from the will of God.

—Defiance of the Incarnation.

More than this, sin is absolutely opposed to the great object of the incarnation of the Lord. "Ye know that He was manifested to take away sins," St. John says. This is one of those great verses in this epistle which are so filled with profound meaning that it is impossible for any commentary to exhaust that meaning. First of all, the pre-existence of the Lord is implied. He "was manifested," we are told; and here again we have an echo of the words in the second verse in the first chapter of this epistle, words which, as has been already pointed out, unmistakably assert the great historic facts and realities of the Christian faith.

Next, this manifestation of Christ was for one purpose—to "take away sins"—the verb "take

away" being the same word as was used in the first memorable testimony uttered by the Baptist to Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and the word hints, even if it does not do more, that He "takes away" sin by taking it on Himself. Then again the completeness and universality of this great redemption are declared in the plural noun "sins," answering to the Baptist's words, "the sin of the world." The salvation of Christ is not a partial remedy for sin, nor does it affect a few favoured individuals alone; it is a complete and universal remedy, and removes sin wheresoever sin is found; so that this salvation has not accomplished its gracious work in us until it has taken away all our sin.

1 John iii. 4–9. For Christ was Manifested to take away Sin.

And now we come to a verse that is an example of St. John's love of presenting truth in its ideal form, a still more striking illustration of which will be found in the sixth verse of this chapter. "Whosoever abideth in Him," he says, "sinneth not"; that is, just so far as the abiding in Christ is real and true, so far will be the sinlessness of life. The deep truth involved in these words will be more clearly seen when we come to examine the ninth verse.

—And in Him there is Security.

Then the apostle, as is his habit, goes on to expand and strengthen this assertion of the sin-

1 John iii. 4–9. But the practice of Sin is Banishment.

lessness of those who abide in Christ, by the statement of its opposite. "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither hath known Him." It is again of importance to the right understanding of these words to note the present tense St. John here uses—"whosoever sinneth"—so that it is not those isolated acts of sin of which every believer from time to time is guilty that the apostle has in view, but habitual sin—sinning as the prevailing habit of the life. This proves that he who thus lives in sin has never either seen nor known Christ. He has never had the vision of the Son of God, nor learnt what it means. There may be, and probably is, a designed reference in these words to those Gnostic teachers who, as we have seen, allowed the grossest lusts, under their pretended teaching of the indifference of the spirit to the body.

Temptation therefore to be resisted.

And the solemn and tender warning which follows confirms the impression that it is these evil and dangerous teachers whom St. John has in view. "My little children," he goes on to say, "let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness"—again a present tense, it is the habitual practice of righteousness that is meant—"is righteous, even as He is righteous: he that doeth sin"—habitually, the A.V. "committeth sin" completely obscures the connexion

of these words with what has just preceded them—"is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning." What a fathomless mystery these last words open before us! We read them, and re-read them, and we are no nearer any light on the dark mystery they touch—the origin of evil. All we can say is, that the origin, like the end of sin, is altogether beyond our powers. 1 John iii. 4–9.

But what a revelation these words are of the awful wickedness of the devil! "He sinneth" —another of St. John's pregnant present tenses —"from the beginning." He has not only once sinned and once fallen, but he lives in sin "from the beginning"; that is, in all probability, from the first moment of his being. This does not make evil co-eternal with the Creator, for the devil, like all finite creatures, had a "beginning"; but it does make the sin of the devil more tremendous and terrible than words can express. He not only lives in habitual sin, but he began that evil life from the very first. Again we realise that we are here in the presence of a mystery that we have no power to solve. The Evil One's Example.

With the next words light suddenly breaks on the darkness of this mystery. "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." Once again we note the reference, as in the fifth verse, to the pre- The Mighty Deliverer.

1 John iii. 4–9.

existence of Christ who was "manifested," but in this verse the more general statement in the previous verse (the fifth) that this manifestation was to "take away sins" is made definite, "that He might destroy the works of the devil"; and for the first time in this epistle the great title of honour, "the Son of God," is given to Christ.

The Son of God.

This can hardly be chosen without some special significance. The majestic Name, above every name, "Son of God," suggests to us the blessed truth that whatsoever may be the power of the great "adversary," however cunning may be the "wiles of the devil," he is confronted by a mightier power—the power of "the Son of God"—and that power will result in no partial triumph over the works of the devil, but in their final and utter extinction. The Son of God will "destroy the works of the devil." Evil will not finally triumph in this or in any world. God is stronger than all the forces of wickedness, and one day we shall behold the fulfilment of Christ's own prayer, "Thy kingdom come."

His Work for His People.

And now we come to the final statement of the impossibility of the children of God living in sin. "Whosoever is begotten of God," St. John goes on to say, "doeth no sin," that is, as the habit of his life, for here again the verb is in the present tense. If this were all that St. John had

said, the words would present no great difficulty. It is, however, the words which follow that at first startle and perplex us. Not content with saying that "whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because His seed abideth in him," the apostle goes on to add, that "he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God." 1 John iii. 4–9.

What is the real explanation and meaning of this startling assertion? The answer seems to be what has already been hinted at in ver. 6, that St. John loved to state truth in its ideal, and therefore in its only true form. No mathematician, to take a very simple illustration, has ever either seen or drawn a circle that perfectly and absolutely answers to its definition as given in Euclid, and yet, notwithstanding, that definition remains absolutely true. The true circle will answer and does answer to it perfectly, and so far as any circle we may draw approaches to the definition, it approaches nearer and nearer to the perfect circle. So it is with the children of God. No child of God has ever lived who has not sinned; but that does not make St. John's words untrue. It only shows that the divine life flowing from the new birth has not been perfected in him. Just so far as the child of God is "begotten" of God, and that new birth has become the seed and the spring of his

The Ideal.

The Actual.

1 John iii. 4–9.

new life, he "cannot sin." And this great and blessed truth is in exact accordance with the change of tense the apostle makes in both parts of this ninth verse. It is the perfect tense marking, not merely the single act of begetting, but its continual efficacy; that is, the initial fact of the new life is regarded in its abiding power. "Whosoever"—St. John's words might not incorrectly be paraphrased—"has been begotten of God," and still remains so, "doeth no sin, because His seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God," and still remains so.

Just as we are filled with that divine life whose origin in the soul is to be found in the new birth, we neither sin nor can sin; so that every fresh development of that life within us will bring us nearer the great ideal God has set before all His children—the sinless life, or in other words, being made like Christ.

XIV

SONSHIP AND SERVICE

1 John iii. 10–18

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 Not as Cain, *who* was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

THESE verses really open a new section of this epistle, and one that is a further development of the great truth contained in the first verse of this chapter. **1 John iii. 10–18.**

1 John iii. 10–18.

Contrasted Children.

There St. John has declared his own wonder and amazement at the unspeakable love of God in calling such as we are His children. "Behold," he says, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are." The thought of their amazing privilege and honour comes back to him again, and now leads him in a few brief but most pregnant sentences to set forth the contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil. And here, at the outset, two points are to be noted as of special importance.

An Inevitable Division.

First of all, the unethical and unscriptural belief, too common in our own day, and so characteristic of the loose and shallow thought that marks much of the so-called popular theology, that all men are children of God, has no place in St. John's teaching. Here, as indeed throughout the New Testament, all mankind are divided into two classes alone. They are either children of God or children of the devil. There is no intermediate or third class. For man, to use Bishop Westcott's words, "there is only light and darkness, and no twilight. He sees only 'life' and 'death.'" And this, as has been said, is the uniform teaching of the New Testament.

God is the Father, the "everlasting Father,"

the Father of all men; for this, to use the late Dr. Dale's words, "is the glorious discovery of the Christian Gospel," and is the "very foundation of the order of the world and of human life," and to this we may add, it is the whole secret of the infinite love of God to man. But the universal Fatherhood of God does not imply, and cannot imply, the universal sonship of man, save in the very general and unethical sense that all men are "His offspring," that is, by creation. In this deeper, more spiritual sense of sonship, all men are not children of God, for that relation is a holy and spiritual relation, determined entirely by man's attitude to God. He may be a child of God, for the Father offers this blessed privilege to all who receive Christ (John i. 12), but he may reject the privilege, and if he does he becomes a child of the devil instead. And thus our Lord Himself said to the Pharisees (John viii. 42, 44), "If God were your Father, ye would love Me. . . . Ye are of your father the devil." Divine sonship, in all the greatness and glory of its privilege and honour, is only conferred on those who are believers in Christ. "Ye are all sons of God," St. Paul says (Gal. iii. 26), "through faith, in Christ Jesus."

1 John iii. 10–18.

All Sons of Creation.

Not all Sons of Grace.

Next, let us note that the distinguishing mark of this sonship is not a mere negation, not the

Sonship proved by Service.

1 John iii. 10–18.

absence of evil-doing, but positive and active goodness. The negative form in which the apostle puts this adds greatly to the force of the statement. "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." That I have not done any harm to my brother proves nothing. The question is, have I done any good to him?—for the final test of character is not the absence of evil, but the presence of good. Righteousness and love—that is, right conduct and right feeling—are always the manifestations of divine sonship, just as their absence is the certain mark of the children of the devil.

—The Service of Love.

This leads St. John to re-deliver the old message of love they had "heard from the beginning," and this in its turn suggests the opposite of love—hatred—which the apostle illustrates — again marking the contrast between children of God and children of the devil—by the conduct of the first brother Cain in murdering Abel. It was Abel's righteousness that excited Cain's hatred. Then, as now, the surest proof of the wickedness of the child of the devil is this, that he is stung into fury, not merely by some wrong done to him, but simply by the spectacle of the goodness of the child of God. "Wherefore slew he him? Because his works

were evil, and his brother's righteous." With that last word St. John closes all he has to say of righteousness in this epistle; but love, in all its manifold revelation, still remains to be declared. **1 John iii. 10–18.**

This contrast of light and of darkness, of the children of God and the children of the devil, this hatred of the former by the latter, has not ceased, it is now going on. "Marvel not, brethren" —this is the only place in this epistle where this affectionate title is used—"if the world hateth you"—the indicative mood marking the fact that this hatred now exists as a present reality. Here, again, we hear a not indistinct echo of Christ's own teaching. He had said (John xv. 18, 19), "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The good opinion of the world is never a good sign for Christians. It hated Christ, it still hates all who are Christ's. Unpopularity with the world is always a mark of the child of God, when religion is deep and real. Once more we are reminded of the eternal contrast between love and hatred, life and death. "We know," St. John says—and the pronoun, as Dr. Plummer remarks, is very emphatic, suggesting the thought that **Sonship and the World's Enmity.**

1 John iii. 10–18.

the "world, which is full of devilish hate, may think and do what it pleases about us"—*we* know that we "have passed out of death into life," and we have not only passed out of death into life, but we are there still, for such is the force of the Greek perfect. Life is, as it were, the new and permanent home in which the believer lives.

Sonship and Love of Brethren.

Love to the brethren because they are brethren is one of the signs of the possession of eternal life. Love in itself may be a purely natural emotion, but love of the brethen, because they are brethren in Christ, is distinctly a supernatural grace. It proves the supernatural birth, just as its absence proves the soul to be still in the darkness of death. "He that loveth not abideth in death"—that is, his original condition, and in it he still "abides." We lose something in our English translation of the depth and force of this contrast St. John here draws between the life of love and the death of hate, for our version does not reproduce the suggestive definite article the apostle prefixes in each case to each word. It is "the Life," "the Death," in which the child of God and the child of the devil respectively live. There are only two possible spheres or states in which men can be found. One is "the Life"—that is, life in all its fulness, life that is "life indeed" (1 Tim. vi. 19); the other is "the

Death," the final ruin and darkness of the soul. 1 John iii. 10–18.

The mention of the murder of Abel by Cain leads the apostle to press home still more closely and searchingly the awful lesson that ought to be learnt from that murder. "You may think" —such seems to be the train of thought in the apostle's mind—"that you are in no peril of this doom of Cain, because you have never murdered your brother; I tell you now, whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." Murder is only hatred in action, hatred is only murder in feeling. Here, again, we are reminded of our Lord's words, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matt. v. 21, 22). —The Meaning of that Love.

But this warning against the sin and peril of hatred is not all the lesson contained in these words. They teach us also two of the deepest and most precious truths of the Gospel. First, that eternal life is not some future possession on which the believer will one day enter, it is a present reality "abiding in him"; and next, that eternal life is not a prize he wins by his own Eternal Life a Present Reality.

1 John iii. 10–18.

efforts or strivings, but is a gift from without, for it "abides" in him. Man has not "life in himself"; only God has that; but "the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord," and thus it comes to "abide" in the heart of the believer.

—Through the Love of God.

This solemn reference to the great law of love, and to its opposite, hatred, leads St. John, by a natural transition, to dwell on the supreme manifestation of love as seen in the death of Christ. And yet how suggestive and how striking is the way in which this reference is actually made! First of all, there is no definite statement of the person whose love is here referred to, for there is no "of God" in the original. "Hereby," says the apostle, "know we love"—as if that one word, comprehending love in all its possible manifestations, could only belong to one person. Nor is there any substantive preceding the verb "laid down," but only the personal pronoun "He," as if any more explicit reference were wholly needless. "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us." The words just quoted, "He laid down His life," not indistinctly recall Christ's own words, "the Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. xx. 28)—indeed, one meaning of the Greek verb "laid down" is actually to lay down as a ransom; but they do more than recall

—In the Sacrifice of Christ's Death.

Christ's own words, they emphasise again the great truth that this surrender of His life by our Lord was His own voluntary act, and not a deed of violence He was compelled to endure from the hatred of others. As Jesus Himself said, "I lay down My life"—the very words used here. "No man taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John x. 17, 18). **1 John iii. 10–18.**

"And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren," the conjunction "and" hinting that this duty follows as a matter of course from the apprehension of our Lord's love. "But"—and this "but" is full of significance; it is as if St. John were saying, "Very few of us are ever called to the greatest of all the sacrifices of love, to die for another, but we *are* called to the lesser sacrifices of daily life, and if we fail there we fail everywhere—" but whoso hath this world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him"—moving, as it were, away from him—"how doth the love of God abide in him?" **The Example of that Sacrifice.**

Do these words compel us to, or sanction, indiscriminate charity? Is a Christian bound to give wherever and whenever he is asked for help? This, at least, is certain, that such charity defeats its own object, and is often the very worst form of cruelty. William Law, for **Our Duty in Works of Charity.**

1 John iii. 10–18.

example, the author of *The Serious Call*, determined, with two friends, to give pecuniary help to all who asked for it in his parish, with the result that such crowds of idle and worthless mendicants were attracted that they became a public nuisance and peril, and the magistrates had to interfere.

Prudence Demanded.

What, then, does the apostle mean? If indiscriminate almsgiving be not only unwise and indeed mischievous, what are we to do, if we desire to avoid the evil, and yet to obey the apostle's injunction? The answer surely is clear enough. The law of Christ never commands us to do any act, however well meant, that would produce more harm than good, and to give money without inquiry, without thought, simply because someone asks for it, is certain to intensify the very evil we desire to remedy. On the other hand, we are not to shut up our ears to the cry of the "need" of our "brother," that is, of our fellow-Christian. If, for example, I have the means to relieve the "need" of some unemployed workman who, with myself, is a believer in Christ, I am bound to relieve that need; only let me be careful I do relieve it, and not aggravate it. It may be that for the moment some money help is the pressing need, but it may also be that to stop there will in no wise

really relieve his need. I must strive by my personal exertion and self-sacrifice to do what I can to remove the cause of the need, as well as the pressure of the need itself; and this is why real Christian charity not only requires much wisdom, but is a difficult and costly thing. To give a shilling to some one wanting bread is an easy thing, but to give myself, my own efforts, to prevent the need in the future, is a very different thing, and till I have done that I have not fulfilled St. John's command.

1 John iii. 10–18. —And Personal Sacrifice.

The lesson is summed up in the next words, "My little children"—the tenderness of the address adding pathos and intensity to the injunction—"let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth," "deed" being the opposite of "word," and "truth" the opposite of "tongue." "If love depends on a word," said a Rabbi, "when the word ceaseth the love ceaseth."

—Reality being Needed.

XV

OBEDIENCE AND ITS REWARD

1 JOHN iii. 19–24

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

23 And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.

1 John iii. 19–24.

THESE verses are in some respects difficult and perplexing, and their interpretation has given rise to considerable difference of opinion amongst expositors. I shall not attempt any detailed account of these differences, but give what seems to me their true meaning.

Love and Assurance of Faith.

The opening words of these verses do not present any difficulty. "Herein"—that is, in

the exercise of this real and active love to our brethren—"we shall assure (or 'persuade') our heart before Him, whereinsoever our heart condemn us." We shall gain the best assurance of our own Christian faith and character in those moments when the heart is burdened with a sense of its own unworthiness, by obedience to the great law of love that will be evidence, in spite of the accusing voice within, that we are children of God. 1 John iii. 19–24.

A Comfort in God's Knowledge of us.

But what is the true place and meaning of the words, "because God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things"? The Greek word translated "because" may also be rendered "that," and it is evident that on the translation given to it the meaning of the clause will depend. If we take it to mean "because," as the Revised Version does, then it will be evident that an additional reason for "assuring our heart before Him" is given in the words, "because God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Because God is all-seeing, and knows us perfectly, He can see that, in spite of these failures or sins for which our heart condemns us, we are truly His, and we prove it by our unfeigned love of the brethren. On the other hand, if we translate by "that," then we must insert some such words as, "it is evident," or, "it is plain," and the

1 John iii. 19–24.

clause will read, "whereinsoever our heart condemn us, (it is evident) that God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." On the whole, the former rendering seems far more probable, as it not only does not require the addition of any words not found in the Greek, but it falls in completely with the context.

—Our Love being Known to Him.

The practical lesson in any case is plain. There are times in every believer's life when, cast down by constant failure and imperfection and sin, he is in danger of despairing of eternal life, because he is conscious of the accusations of conscience within condemning him. Then is the time to fall back on the blessed truth that even if our heart condemn us, God may not, for He is greater than our heart, and knows all things—knows that, notwithstanding these manifold imperfections and sins, our heart is truly His, and we do love the brethren.

The Clear Conscience.

Now follows the bright and blessed contrast, so much after St. John's manner. "Beloved"—the tenderness of the address being suggested by the thought of the accusing fears of the believer—"if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight."

Obedience and its Reward

Two great results are here declared to follow from a conscience at peace. First, "boldness toward God"—that is, our approach to God is like the approach of a child to a father who loves him, and whom he loves. A peaceful conscience always shows itself in prayer. You may judge what a man is to God when you hear how he comes to God.

1 John iii. 19–24.

Its Attitude: Boldness.

A second, and still greater and more blessed result of this not accusing conscience, is that all prayer is at once answered. "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him," not "we shall receive," for the verb is in the present tense, suggesting that the answer comes as soon as the prayer is offered. But is it true that all the prayers of the child of God are answered? Must there not be some limitation to this statement? To this it may be answered, first of all, in the words an old and wise saint once uttered, "God always answers my prayer, only sometimes He answers 'Yes,' and sometimes He answers 'No'"; and next, that just so far as we are in perfect harmony with the will of God, our prayers will themselves be according to that will, and will therefore be certain of an answer.

Its Boon: Prayer Answered.

And this is exactly what St. John says, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, *because* we keep His commandments, and do the things

Obedience Honoured by God.

1 John iii. 19–24.

that are pleasing in His sight"; and if it be objected that no Christian always keeps the commandments of God, and always does what is pleasing to God, it must again be remembered, as has already been remarked, that the apostle loves to state the truth in its ideal forms, which, after all, are the only true forms of truth.

The One Law to be Obeyed.

And now in the closing verses of this chapter the apostle sums up all the manifold commandments of God into one commandment, for the law of God, howsoever many its applications, is a Divine unity, such a unity that, as St. James says, "whosoever shall stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all." This one commandment that comprehends all the "commandments," and the "things that are pleasing in His sight," is the law of faith and the law of love, two but really one, for love always springs from the root of faith. "This is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another."

The Gift of the Spirit.

The chapter closes with two of St. John's favourite words here brought into close conjunction, "abideth," "we know." "He that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us." This is the first time the Spirit has been mentioned by name

in this epistle, but after this He is referred to again and again, and the Greek tense the apostle here uses of the bestowal of the Spirit is full of the deepest meaning. He does not say of the Spirit "which He gives," or "will give" to us, but he uses the Greek aorist, implying a definite act in a past tense. **1 John iii. 19–24.**

Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

There is no warrant in the New Testament, that I am aware of, for Christians praying for the Spirit, as they are often heard praying, as if God had yet to bestow upon them this greatest and holiest gift. Many of our popular hymns, it is true, are prayers for the coming of the Holy Ghost, and they have done much, very much, to hide from the believer the blessed fact that when he believed in Christ he not only received the pardon of sin, but received also the very life of God Himself by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Spirit Himself dwells in the heart of the Christian, and however much he may desire and pray to be filled with this Spirit, he ought never to forget that this most blessed gift of the Father is already his. "God gave" the Spirit once for all to him who believes, and the "gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

XVI

CONTRASTED GUIDES

1 JOHN iv. 1–6.

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.

5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

1 John iv. 1–6. Contrasted Spirits and Contrasted Teachers.

THE last words of the last verse of the third chapter, "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us," lead by a natural transition, to the subject of the opening verses of this fourth chapter, the contrast between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (vers. 1–3), and this in its turn leads on to the contrast

between false teachers and true (vers. 4–6). It is quite after the manner of the apostle, as we have already more than once noted in the previous part of the epistle, to draw out these sharp spiritual and ethical contrasts. Light, darkness; the love of the Father, the love of the world; the true Christ, and the false Christ or Antichrist; the children of God and the children of the devil; the love of a brother, and the hatred of a brother; the laying down of life as Christ laid His life down, the taking away of life in the murder of Abel by Cain—these are among the striking contrasts St. John has already drawn in this epistle, and now he goes on to mark the contrast between the Spirit of God and the spirit of error, between the true teacher and the false.

1 John iv. 1–6.

The False Prophets.

In order to understand the solemnity and point of the apostle's warning we must remember that these false "prophets" to whom St. John refers were not open and professed opponents of Christianity, like Celsus—to take only one typical example—who called Christianity the "latest folly in the world's madhouse," they were, on the contrary, men who professed to accept Christianity, but to give its doctrines and teachings their true and inner meaning.

These early Gnostics claimed the possession

1 John iv. 1–6. Warning against Them.

of that superior knowledge which enabled them to impart to those who were initiated the hidden and secret and true meaning of the Christian Gospel. They spoke, as it seemed, with a Christian tongue, but none the less they were deadly opponents of Christianity and of Christ. Hence the urgency of the warning with which this fourth chapter opens. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove (test) the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." The word translated "prove" in the R.V. is one derived from the testing or assaying of metals, and suggests at once the truth that the spirits who teach ought first of all to be tested, or "proved," to see whether they are true or false prophets.

The Test Proposed.

And what is the test to which they are to be put? The answer is found in the 2nd verse of this chapter, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God." Every word in this pregnant verse is full of meaning, and will repay careful thought.

—The Incarnation.

First of all St. John does not say that belief that Christ had come "into" the flesh is a mark of the Spirit of truth, but belief that Jesus Christ had come "in" the flesh. Many of the Gnostic

teachers—Cerinthus among them—taught that the Christ came down from heaven on the baptism of Jesus, and took possession then of a man already existing; that is, the Christ came "into" flesh. St. John teaches, on the contrary, that the Incarnation was the coming of Christ "in" the flesh, that is, to use the great and majestic words of the 1st chapter of St. John's Gospel, "the Word became flesh." 1 John iv. 1–6.

Next, this assumption of human nature by the eternal Son of God was not an event that was merely temporary, and had therefore passed by, it is a permanent reality. "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh," the tense of the verb indicating that the coming of Christ in the flesh is an abiding fact. And once again, it is not a merely intellectual and barren belief in the Incarnation that is to be the test of the spirits; it is "confession" of this truth, the open and bold and heartfelt acknowledgment of the person of the Incarnate Saviour; and, last of all, this solemn testing of all teachers and of all spirits, by their willingness thus openly to acknowledge the Incarnation, is a duty resting on all Christians alike; it is for them—St. John's "beloved" children—not for the official heads and teachers of the Church, to "prove the spirits, whether they are of God." —As a Reality. —To be Fully Accepted.

1 John iv. 1–6.

The Modern Danger.

This brief summary of the meaning and teaching of these words of the apostle will be sufficient to show us how applicable they are to the needs and errors and perils of our own day. The greatest danger to which the Christian faith is exposed to-day is not from those who openly deny the possibility of the supernatural, not from the avowed unbeliever, the agnostic, or the atheist, but from those who professedly accept Christianity, and then proceed to explain, or rather to explain away, after their own fashion, all its most vital and characteristic teachings. A great deal of the loose talk that is too common in the present day about the need of the "re-statement" of the Gospel "in terms of modern thought" is really nothing more than the re-appearance in modern guise of the ancient Gnosticism.

The Abolition of Facts.

To separate "the ideas" of the faith from its historic "facts," to profess to believe in the divine nature of Christ, because all men are more or less divine, but to deny His origin and supernatural birth of a virgin; to speak of the atonement of Christ, but at the same time to say that every man who lives a Christ-like life or does a self-sacrificing deed is also offering up an atonement for sin; to affirm the truth of the resurrection of Christ, but to add that Jesus rose

just as John Wesley rose from the dead; to make the resurrection of our Lord a "purely spiritual happening," whatever the words may mean, but to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the grave; to admit the reality of the second advent of our Lord, not because it will really be a "second" coming, but because Jesus is always coming to men—these are only a few modern illustrations of perilous heresies, some of them akin to many Gnostic speculations, re-stated in terms of modern thought. 1 John iv. 1–6.

St. John would have searched and tested the whole of them by the solemn question, "Do you really believe and confess the historic and permanent reality of the Incarnation of the Son of God?" If not, then howsoever specious and seductive your teaching may be, it is the teaching of a "false prophet," it is not the teaching of the Spirit of Christ, but of the "spirit of the Antichrist," and, to use for a moment a very ancient, although doubtless unfounded, reading in this 3rd verse, it is teaching that "annulleth Jesus." It is "another Gospel which is not another." It is to "betray" the Son of Man "with a kiss." St. Johns' Test.

But howsoever serious and widespread was the mischief of the Gnostic heresy in St. John's own time, and howsoever serious and widespread may Comfort for the Faithful.

1 John iv. 1–6.

be the departures from the faith once for all delivered unto the saints in our own day, neither they nor we need have any fear nor any doubt as to the final issue; and so the next words we hear sound like a trumpet-call on the battle-field, giving heart and encouragement to all in the thick of the fight: "Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

One can hardly fail to catch an echo in these words of Christ's own encouragement to His disciples, "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world," and it will repay us to try and gather up the teaching of the apostle.

The Duty of Warfare against the False.

First of all, he implies that it is the duty of every Christian to engage in constant warfare against every false prophet and all false teaching. Neutrality is impossible in this world. We must be either "for" Christ or "against Him." To cease to fight against evil and against error is to be traitors to our Lord and to truth. Next, he assures us that if we are faithful in this battle, victory is already ours. He does not promise us the victory at some future time; he does not say, "Ye will overcome," but "Ye have overcome them." The end of the battle is certain, for we can see it already beginning, and to the eye of faith the victory is already won.

1 John iv. 1–6.

The Assurance of Victory

And then again he gives to us the blessed ground and assurance of this final victory. It is not ours but God's, for it is from Him, and Him alone, that victory comes, and just as we are His He will fight for us, and the victory is sure. "Ye are of God, my little children," St. John says—in marked and solemn contrast with what in a moment he will say of all these false teachers, "they are of the world," but in sweet and full accordance with what he will presently say of himself and of those who are his fellow-teachers—"We are of God." Apostle and disciple alike share this supreme and glorious privilege and joy. They are "of God," and because they are, they are confident of the final issue, "for greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

—Over the Evil One.

And once again let us note here the personal pronoun as applied to the source of all evil; it is not "it," but "he." In its last resort all evil finds its origin in a personal spirit of evil, to whom in this evil unity all the various spirits of evil and all the false prophets bear the same relation as all the spirits of truth and all true teachers occupy in relation to God.

—Though False Teaching may win Followers.

It is little wonder if these false teachers gained the ear of the world, for they themselves "are of the world," that is, they come from and belong

1 John iv. 1–6.

to this present, finite, and sensible order of existence, not to the unseen and eternal and supernatural world, and their speech is also "of the world," the repetition of the preposition "of," or more literally "out of," being most impressive. It does not follow because a crowd gathers to hear a professed teacher of truth that he is teaching truth: it may be that the contrary is the fact. If he were teaching the truth of God, it is quite possible he might be listened to by only a few, but it is not at all wonderful if he is teaching error that the world runs to hear him. The explanation is very simple; it is to-day as in the apostle's time, "they are out of the world, therefore speak they out of the world, and the world heareth them." The real tests of a teacher and of his teaching and his work lie far away from the crowd, and must be sought in the spiritual origin and the spiritual results of his teaching.

—For they are of the World.

—And "We are of God."

The apostle has spoken of false teachers; he now contrasts with them the true teachers, and especially the apostles of Christ. "We," he says —and this pronoun is specially emphatic, as marking the contrast in his mind—"are of God." The note of apostolic authority and assurance is unmistakable here; but we ought not to forget that this assurance and confidence of the apostle that he is "of God" has not long before been

asserted of all true believers in Christ. In the 4th verse we read the words, "Ye are of God, little children," so that the commonalty of the Church, ordinary men and women who are believers, share with the apostles of Christ the blessed privilege and assurance of being "of God." Nor are this holy confidence and assurance the presumption of ignorance or of self-delusion. Life is always its own best evidence, indeed, its only evidence, and the life the believer lives in Christ affords to him day by day not merely the hope, which may be fitful and wavering, but the positive certainty that he is not "of the world," but "of God." **1 John iv. 1–6.**

An Assurance that should be Normal.

We shall see later on in our exposition of this epistle, that according to the teaching of the apostle faith never remains faith alone, but passes on to knowledge, and this knowledge of the Son of God and of His great salvation becomes absolute assurance and certitude of eternal life, so that all true believers can say, with the apostle, "we know that we are of God"; but it is sufficient for us here to note the fact that assurance of the divine sonship ought to be the normal experience of every Christian. It is true that this assurance may be lost at times, or clouded over, through failure or imperfection or sin, or even from physical causes, such as loss of health

1 John iv. 1–6.

or depression of spirits due to that loss, but none the less, no Christian ought to be content to live in a state of continuous uncertainty as to his own relation to God. If he is "of God," he ought to know it, and to be sure of it, and there ought to be times in his own life and experience when this victorious note of certainty makes its music heard, times when, instead of singing—

> "My soul looks back to Thee,
> The burdens thou didst bear
> When hanging on th' accursed tree,
> And *hopes* her guilt was there,"

he is so full of the assurance of God's salvation that he sings, almost involuntarily,

> "And *knows* her guilt was there."

Knowledge and Response.

The same solemn note of authority and certitude is heard in the next words the apostle writes, as if the fact he states has passed beyond the need of argument or of proof—"he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not." Can any words be more daring, or, if the words are not true, a more presumptuous and insolent assertion? To say without apology or any kind of modification of language to any audience, "If you are Christians, you will listen to my teaching and receive it; if you refuse to receive it, this shows that you are

not Christians at all"—to say that, can only be one of two things, the height of presumptuous folly, or the calm confidence of one who is certain he is in possession of absolute truth. Which is it? 1 John iv. 1–6.

If a mathematician tells his pupils that if they had ordinary common sense they will need no proof that two straight lines cannot enclose a space, or if the ethical teacher declares that the man who requires him to demonstrate that purity is right and uncleanness wrong is himself morally unsound—they are not presuming in saying these things. The confidence and certitude of these statements only serve to show that they are absolutely sure of the truth; and if the apostle says that the Christian will hear him because he is a Christian, and the unbeliever will refuse to hear him because he is an unbeliever, he too is justified in his statement, because he knows he is speaking out of the certitude of truth.

A Progressive Knowledge.

The words "knoweth God" do not, however, convey to an English reader the rich and full meaning of the apostle's statement. The Greek word that he uses and that is translated in our versions "knoweth" does not mean a knowledge that is either complete and full in itself, or a knowledge that comes to us from some one act, like that of the instant recognition of a friend on

1 John iv. 1–6.

seeing him; it means a knowledge that is both progressive and continuous, so that without doing any violence to the words of the apostle we might render them, "he that groweth" or "increaseth" in "the knowledge of God." The same word is, significantly enough, found in our Lord's great high-priestly prayer, "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God."

Not a Complete Knowledge.

Two most important and practical truths are therefore contained in the words of the apostle. First of all, as has just been said, the Christian's knowledge of God is never complete and final. There are some kinds of human knowledge which are incapable of any change or growth. Thus, for example, if I have once learnt the multiplication table I can never learn anything more about it, but there are other kinds of knowledge which are constantly growing and increasing. All scientific knowledge, for example, is being continually added to by each fresh discovery. So too our personal knowledge of our fellow-men is never complete, but grows from day to day in intercourse with them.

The knowledge of God is, similarly, never full and final knowledge, but always incomplete and progressive, and so St. Paul prays for the Colossian Church that they may "increase in

the knowledge of God." We are to "grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 1 John iv. 1–6.

Even in eternity itself we shall never fully and completely know God. The infinite will always be infinitely beyond the knowledge of the finite, but we shall more and more fully know Him, and this knowledge will be the joy and glory of heaven.

Growth in Discrimination.

And it is as we grow in the knowledge of God that we grow also in the apprehension of divine truth, and in the certitude wherewith we judge those who teach it. This power of discerning the true message of God and the true messenger who brings it, may not be, and in all probability will not be, found fully developed in the earlier and immature stages of the Christian life. A young student just beginning music will not, at first, notice all false notes when they are played, but the ear of the trained musician will detect them in a moment; and just so the young Christian may not, all at once, be able to discern a false teacher and false teaching, or a true teacher and his true teaching, but as he slowly but surely grows in the knowledge of God he will as surely know those who are "of God" and bring His message and His truth to the soul. Nothing is more remarkable in the history of

1 John iv. 1–6.

the Church than the way in which the Church has judged the teacher and his teaching, and how surely it has discerned the voice of one who comes from God when it has heard it. The great historic creeds of Christendom, and the individual experience of each believer in Christ, are one long commentary on the apostle's words —"he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not."

A General Privilege.

This section of the epistle closes with the reiteration of the test of all truth and of all error, and with the emphatic declaration that this form of "discerning the spirits" does not belong to the apostles alone, but is the privilege and power of all true disciples. "By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error," that is, by the recognition of the truth and of the true Teacher on the one hand, and the rejection of the error and of the false teacher on the other.

XVII

GOD IS LOVE

1 JOHN iv. 7–13

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.

1 John iv. 7–13.

IN these verses we enter upon what is really the central part of the second half of St. John's epistle. As has been already noticed, two great key-words dominate the two halves of this epistle; the first "God is Light," the second "God is Love." Around these two truths about

1 John iv. 7–13.

God all the various parts of each half, so to speak, revolve.

St. John on "Love."

In the passage before us we have the apostle's deepest and fullest teaching on love, both in its divine and its human relations. "In no book in the New Testament," Dr. Plummer remarks, "does the substantive 'love' occur so often as in these two and a half chapters (iii. 1–v. 12), and in no book in the New Testament, excepting the Fourth Gospel, does the verb 'to love' occur half so many times as here."

The Christian Idea and Word.

It is worthy of remark, as showing the remarkable influence of Christian thought on speech, that the Greek word translated "love" in our English versions is a word, as Archbishop Trench said, "born within the bosom of revealed religion; it occurs in the Septuagint, but *there is no example of its use in any heathen writer whatsoever*"; and to this it may be added—and the fact is equally suggestive—that the ordinary Greek word for love—a word tinged with sensual passion—never once occurs in the New Testament The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ baptised language afresh, as well as souls, and finding no word great enough and pure enough to express the central truth revealed by the Incarnation, that "God is love," created a new word, to reveal the new truth concerning God.

God is Love

1 John iv. 7–13. Love is of God.

Twice before St. John has spoken of brotherly love (chap. ii. 7–11 and iii. 10–18), but now he reaches the climax of his exhortation by declaring that love ought to be the characteristic of all the children of God, because it is of the very nature of their Father, of God Himself. "Beloved," he says, "let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

The Witness of Brotherly Love.

It is evident that we cannot take St. John's words, "Every one that loveth is begotten of God," without some kind of limitation. In fact, love in itself is a purely natural emotion, and although we may believe that, howsoever adulterated it often is with baser feelings, it had its original home and origin in God—as St. John himself says, "love is of God"—it is equally certain that the possession of a natural emotion can never be the proof of the possession of a supernatural grace, of being "begotten of God." How then can we explain the apparently unlimited character of the apostle's assertion that "every one that loveth is begotten of God"? The answer is not hard to find, for it is evident that St. John is here thinking, not of love in general to all men, but of the love of which he had before been speaking, the "new commandment" Christ

1 John iv. 7–13.

had given to His own disciples to "love one another" (*cf.* chap. ii. 7–11).

In this narrower and more restricted sense it is absolutely true that the love of the brethren is an unfailing proof of having been "begotten of God." If I love my own relatives, or my own friends, I am indulging a purely natural and human instinct—"do not even the publicans the same?"—but if, on the other hand, I find myself drawn out in affection towards those whose only bond between them and myself is a common faith in Christ, then that is a sure and blessed sign that I have been "born again." And, after St. John's manner, he goes on to emphasise the opposing truth to that which he had just uttered, "he that loveth not," he adds—and here the change of tense is remarkable—"knew not God," that is, referring in all probability to the time of his public profession of faith. That profession was altogether empty and vain, if it be not found associated with love—he "knew not God."

God is Love.

And then, at last, we come to the culmination and crown of all St. John has to say, the greatest words ever spoken in human speech, the greatest words in the whole Bible, that one truth

"Well worth all languages in earth or heaven,"

"God is love." Twice before in the New

Testament—once from the lips of our Lord Himself (John iv. 24), and once in this epistle from St. John (*cf.* i. 5)—we have had two great revealing words concerning God. "God is Spirit," "God is Light," and now we come to the third, the last and greatest of these great statements about what God is in Himself, "God is Love." We owe this triple revelation of God to the Bible alone. No religion in the whole world, outside of revealed religion, has ever attained to the knowledge of God contained in these three short and simple but unfathomable sentences—"God is Spirit," "God is Light," "God is Love." They destroy all the vain assertions of a philosophical unbelief, whether it calls itself atheism or agnosticism or pantheism, for these words assert the Personal Being, the Holiness and the Love of God. He is "Spirit," and spirit is personality. He is Holy Spirit, for He is "Light"; and He is "Love," that is, in Himself His very nature is love. 1 John iv. 7–13.

It is impossible to suggest even in briefest outline all that these words contain, for no human and no created intellect has ever, or will ever, fathom their unfathomable meaning; but we may reverently say that this one sentence concerning God contains the key to all God's works and ways. The solution of the mystery of A Key to all God's Works and Ways.

1 John iv. 7–13.

creation is here. God created for no other reason than His love. He brought the universe into being because of His love. The solution of the great mystery of redemption is here, as we shall see when we consider the words which immediately follow this verse; and last of all, the words not indistinctly point to the mystery of all mysteries, the Being of God Himself, that triunity which is His eternal and essential nature, and which finds its own perfect life in the infinite love of Father, Son, and Spirit. On the practical value of this great truth it is hardly necessary to dwell. In every age a great company of mourners have found their only abiding and strong consolation in the words "God is love."

And now the apostle goes on to tell us that not only is God "love" in Himself, in His inmost nature, but that He has "manifested" that love to men, and in three wonderful ways.

Love Manifest in the Incarnation.

First of all, in the supreme glory of the Incarnation. "Herein was the love of God manifested in us"—that in us, as the sphere in which it was revealed and by whom it was apprehended—"that God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world." If God had sent a son into the world, it would have been a revelation of wonderful love, but to have sent His "only-born" Son is a surpassing manifestation of love.

God is Love

Once again we are reminded, as we have been so often already in this epistle, of the great historic fact on which all our faith rests. The Incarnation is not a dream, it is history. "God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world"; but it is even more than past history, it is an abiding reality. That "fair Galilean vision" did not appear for a little while to entrance men's gaze with its loveliness, and then vanish away; it is a permanent revelation of God, as the perfect tense St. John here uses indicates. 1 John iv. 7–13.

—In the Gift of Life to us.

And next, the love of God has been manifested, not only in the Incarnation, but in its object—"that we might live through Him." This is the only place in St. John's epistles in which he uses the verb "to live," but its use here is most impressive. The whole object of the Incarnation was the bestowal of life upon those who were dead—"I am come," said Jesus, "that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." The relation of the believer's life to his Lord, as it is declared in the New Testament, is full of the profoundest significance; Christ lives in him (Gal. ii. 20), and so he manifests the "life of Jesus" (2 Cor. iv. 10); Christ is the aim of his life, he lives "to the Lord" (Rom. xiv. 8); Christ is the very life he lives (Phil. i. 21, Col. iii. 4); and last of all, he will

1 John iv. 7–13.

one day live "with Him" (1 Thess. v. 10), and he will live with Him because Christ Himself ever lives. "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John xiv. 19).

Let any reader study these passages in their consecutive teaching, and he will have a rich reward.

—In the Provision of a Propitiation for our Sins.

And now, last of all, St. John comes to the greatest revelation of the love of God, that He "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." It is quite easy to caricature the teaching of the New Testament on the "propitiation" our Lord offered for human sin, and to speak of it as alien from the New Testament. But if it be alien, there is another representation of that death that is even more alien still, and that is the assertion, so often made in what is called the "Broad Theology" of the present day, that because God is love, therefore He can need no propitiation. This is not what St. John says. He says, because God is love He provided the propitiation. According to St. John, love and propitiation are not antagonistic terms; they are so closely related that it is the Father's love that sent the propitiation, and it is the propitiation that reveals the love. No doctrine or theory of the Atonement can be true that conceals or minimises either its God-ward aspect,

that it was a propitiation offered for human sin by the Son of God, or its man-ward aspect, that this propitiation was the supreme revelation of the love of God to man. And, as has been already remarked in the only other verse in the epistle, and, indeed, in the New Testament (*cf.* ii. 2), where this great word "propitiation" occurs, we learn that this propitiation is not a past and superseded fact, it is a present and abiding reality. Whatsoever Jesus did for man on the cross and by His death remains an eternal fact, a present power. "He IS the propitiation for our sins," and therefore every sinful child of man may find in His perfect oblation a present atonement for present sin.

This Propitiation an Abiding Reality.

And now for the last time in this epistle the apostle uses the endearing address that has already occurred four times. "Beloved"—and he uses this tender word to enforce the great lesson of love that he is about to draw from the wonderful manifestation of God's love to us on which he has dwelt—"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." It may be said in passing that the use of the conjunction "if" in this place does not hint any kind of doubt as to what follows, for, by one of those delicate shades of meaning of which the Greek language, but unhappily not our own, is capable, the word

A Duty of the Beloved.

1 John iv. 7–13.

used carries with it the inference to a Greek reader that such is the fact. "If," as is the case, "God so loved us, then, etc."

An Unexpected Inference.

Two points are worthy of notice here. First, that this inference is not the one we would have naturally expected St. John first of all to have drawn from the manifestation of the love of God to us. We should rather have thought that he would have gone on to say, "We ought also to love Him"; but he does not. The love of the brethren for each other is not only the mark by which they will be known by all men to be Christ's disciples, as He Himself said, but it sometimes is the first result produced by the consideration of the love of God. In that supreme moment when we realised the amazing love of God to us, all the bitterness and alienations and dissensions of life were consumed like stubble or weeds in a flame, and it was impossible not to love those who, for the first time, we felt were our dear kindred, our brothers in Christ, and who had been loved, as we had been, with His infinite love.

The Atonement an Ethical Fact.

Then again, we are reminded here, as so often in the New Testament, of the vital connexion there is between the Atonement as a fact and a doctrine, and life. The "propitiation" the Son of God offered once for all for human sin

is the strongest ethical force in human life. Socialists often speak glowing words of the coming brotherhood of man, but Socialism has no dynamic at its back to create that brotherhood. It is only at the cross we learn to love man, because there we first learn God's love to us. **1 John iv. 7–13.**

Love Revealing God to the Soul.

The connexion of the verses which now follow with those which have gone before is quite simple and very suggestive. St. John has been speaking of love to the brethren; he now goes on to add, that this love reveals God to the soul. "No one," he says, "beheld God"—that is, saw and gazed on God—"at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us." We do more even than behold God from without, or from afar, we find Him actually dwelling—"abiding" in us. Six times over in the next few verses St. John uses this favourite word of his, "abide," one he had learnt from the lips of his Divine Master, and each time with some new emphasis or shade of meaning. Here he says that this love of the brethren actually leads to the constant indwelling of God in the heart, just as, we may add, hatred or bitterness of feeling of any kind surely expels Him from the heart. And it does more, for love of the brethren actually reacts on the love of God, or at least on our consciousness of that love, and perfects it.

—Through Love of the Brethren.

1 John iv. 7–13. Love Acting and Reacting.

Here again, in this thought of the perfecting of love, we are in the presence of another of St. John's favourite thoughts, for he has already spoken of it in the 2nd chapter (ver. 5), and a little later on in this chapter he will again recur to it (ver. 17). The love that we show towards all who belong to Christ always leads to a fuller apprehension of God's love and to a fuller love to God; and in this, the possession of the spirit of love, we are made conscious by continuous and progressive experience (for this is the meaning of the words "we know" which now follow) of the blessed reality of the Divine indwelling. If all love has its original home in God, and comes from God, then the possession of the spirit of love is a certain proof that we possess the Spirit of God, and that He abides in us. "He has given us," as the apostle says, "of His Spirit."

XVIII

GOD'S LOVE AND OUR LOVE

1 JOHN iv. 14–21

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love Him, because He first loved us.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

1 John iv. 14–21.

The Son the Revelation of the Father.

AND now, by a natural transition of thought, St. John passes once more to the great reality of the Incarnation, and to all that it implied. He had just said that, "No man hath beheld God at any time," and this is true; but if we

1 John iv. 14–21.

have not beheld God, we have "beheld" His Son. "We have beheld and bear witness," he says, "that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Here again, as Archbishop Alexander remarks, we have one of the numerous links that bind the epistle to the gospel. The words the apostle uses are the words of one who had been himself an eye-witness of the revelation of the Son of God, and they repeat, what he had already affirmed in the opening words of this epistle (*cf.* chap. i. 1–3), the great reality of the Incarnation.

A Continuous Witness.

The tenses, too, which are used in this verse are full of meaning. We have two perfect tenses and one present, the perfect carrying with it, as it always does in Greek, the thought, not only of a past and finished act, but of a past act still continuing. "We have beheld," and "the vision still abides with us," and "are bearing witness," the continuous witness being the result of the abiding experience, "that the Father hath sent the Son," the testimony being borne not simply to the isolated fact of the Incarnation in the past, but to the Incarnation in its abiding and permanent reality (*cf.* ver. 9)—"to be the Saviour of the world."

The Purpose of the Incarnation.

These last words are part of the great charter of the missionary enterprise. Christ became

incarnate, suffered, and died for nothing less than to save the world. This was the supreme object of the mission of the Son of God, and that the world is not yet saved is not because of any failure in the Divine purpose, for that remains ever constant—"He willeth that all men should be saved" (1 Tim. ii. 4)—not because of any inadequacy in the means provided for the saving of the world, for Christ is "the Saviour of the world"—but because the Church of God has never fully realised the solemnity and greatness of the trust committed to it to "preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mark xvi. 15). Happily, there are signs that the Church is awakening to a new sense of its privilege and responsibility of being "put in trust with the Gospel," and already "the evangelisation of the world in our generation" has become the motto and aim of a new crusade that seeks to conquer the world for Christ.

1 John iv. 14–21.

The Slackness of the Church.

Sometimes, it is true, the world-wide scope and possibilities of the missionary enterprise are doubted or even denied, on the perilous ground that the prophetic word of Scripture holds out no hope of a converted world, and that the utmost the Church can do is to preach the Gospel for a "witness," without either hope or expectation

Is the Gospel for the World?

1 John iv. 14–21.

that all men will be saved. It is always a dangerous thing to interpret the plain teaching of Scripture by the obscure, or to resist the undoubted meaning of any passage by an appeal to the doubtful or uncertain; but we are on safe and sure ground when we affirm that whatsoever may be the teaching of prophecy as to the future of the human race, whatsoever shadows or darkness may fall on the end, the light shining from this verse is bright and clear —"the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

The Power of an Endless Life.

Once again, like the ever-recurring note of some sweet refrain, the apostle strikes again the rich music of the Incarnation—"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God." "God . . . in him," and "he in God." These simple words—and yet how unutterably profound!—mark the two fundamental realities of the Divine life. The believer has dwelling within him the "power of an endless life," even the very life of the eternal God Himself; and in this life he finds all he needs of strength for duty or for conflict, and he himself is "in God"—that is, his deepest and truest life is not lived on earth, for he belongs to another world, a heavenly and spiritual world, "in God."

1 John iv. 14–21. Knowledge and Faith Conjoined.

The next verse brings before us once again the rich suggestiveness of the tenses the apostle uses. "We know," he says, but the verb is not in the present tense, it is in the perfect—"We have known and we have believed"—in each case the action is not only past but present as well—"the love which God hath in us." Knowledge and faith are not dissociated, but conjoined, for they are really separate parts of the same whole; and it may be said with equal truth, as here, that knowledge leads to faith, and that faith leads to knowledge (2 Tim. i. 12).

The Perfecting of Love.

And now in the closing verses of this chapter the apostle sums up all that he has to say about love. Already he has uttered the great words "God is love" (ver. 8), but then the dominant thought was of birth and knowledge (ver. 7) (Westcott); now the thought is mainly of life. "He that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." This has been affirmed in the 12th verse, but here it leads up to a wholly new and unexpected conclusion. "Herein"—that is, in this blessed and sacred fellowship of God with man, and of man with God—"is love made perfect with us," that is, just as we realise the glorious privilege of the divine indwelling of the life of God in us, and of our human life abiding in God, we realise more and more of

1 John iv. 14–21.

the infinite fulness of the love of God to us, and we also more and more love Him, for this double reference of the words "love made perfect with us" seems undoubted.

—And its Purpose.

And then comes the great end and object of this perfecting of love. It is not too much to say that it would only have occurred to one who, like St. John, was living continually within the sight and sound of the eternal world. "Love is perfected with us," he says, "in order that we may have boldness in the day of judgment." How incidentally, and yet how solemnly, the great realities of the Gospel of Christ and of the next world suddenly appear in the apostle's writing! We are in a moment face to face with the Judgment Day, with the great white throne, with the Judge seated on it, countless myriads of angels surrounding Him, and we ourselves there to be judged, and yet, facing the awful Judge, with the eyes like a flame of fire searching us through and through, we are not afraid, "we have boldness in the day of judgment."

The Believers Represent Christ

And why? This boldness is not presumption and not ignorance nor folly, it is well-grounded confidence, "because as He is, even so are we in this world." The life of the believer in Christ even "in this world" is a representation of the life of Christ. Not indeed of the accidents of

that earthly life, for it is not as "He was," that "we are in this world," but "as He is," our life represents His in its permanent characteristics. The humblest believer has the unspeakable joy and blessedness of knowing that the life he lives on earth, in its deepest and truest meaning, is not so much his life as his Lord's, that Christ liveth in him; and this assurance gives him "boldness in the day of judgment," for Christ will never condemn any one who shares, even though imperfectly, His own divine life and character. **1 John iv. 14–21.**

But this is not all that is involved in the words "as He is, even so are we in this world." If the life of the believer is, in some measure at any rate, a representation and reproduction of the life of Christ, that life, as Christ now lives it in the eternal world, is also a real representation of the life of the believer here. In other words, Christ represents us as truly as we represent Him. His glorified humanity and His perfected human character are the ideal representation before the Father of what we shall one day become. He "appears," as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says (chap. ix. 24) "before the face of God for us"; and in Him God sees all who are His; His acceptance is theirs, His glory is theirs, His perfection is theirs, and therefore we have **—And Christ the Believers.**

1 John iv. 14–21.

"boldness in the day of judgment," for the Judge on the throne and they who are judged are "all of one."

Love and Fear.

This thought of the "boldness" all the children of God have leads St. John still further to dwell on the contrasts between love and fear. "There is no fear in love," he adds: "but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love." There is a sense, and a very real and true sense, in which even the love of God has room in its heart for the fear of God. Indeed, there can be no true religion without fear, and one of the most serious symptoms of the religious life of to-day is the loss of the fear of God. "No one now," the late Dr. Dale wrote, "seems to fear God." But this fear is holy and salutary fear—the reverent awe of one who knows the unspeakable greatness and holiness of God; whereas the fear of which the apostle speaks is the fear of the slave who crouches trembling at his master's feet, dreading the lash. Bengel, in what Bishop Westcott called "one of his unmatched epigrams," gives us the history of the soul in its attitude to fear and love. "Without fear and without love; with fear and without love; with fear and with love; without fear and with love." Only it ought to be remembered that not only

is the fear against which St. John warns us a servile fear, but it is fear as the habitual attitude of the soul (as the present tense indicates) towards God; and such unmixed and constant fear is the sign of imperfection in love. And now in closing what he has to say on love, the apostle traces all our love, whether to God or to our brethren, to God's first love to us. "We love"—love of every kind is meant, for there is no "Him" in the original—"because He first loved us"; and this priority of the love of God to all love on our part to Him, ought to lead us—for such seems to be the connexion of the words which now follow—to love our brethren, even when they do not love us. We ought not to *wait* for their love before loving them, but, as God did not wait for ours, but "first loved us," so we ought to love them; nay, more, the reality of our love to God is proved and manifested by our love to the brethren. They are continually before us, in our sight. He is unseen, and it is certainly impossible to hate one's own brother and to love God. He who fails to see God as He is revealed in his brother will even more surely fail to love God; and the whole passage closes with reminding us that love of the brethren is a duty resting on the commandment of God, and this commandment bids any man who loves God cease-

1 John iv. 14–21.

The Spring of Our Love.

1 John iv. 14–21.

lessly to aim at also loving his brother. "This commandment have we from Him, that"—and the particle imperfectly rendered in an English version by "that," marks the whole scope and end of the commandment—"he who loveth God love his brother also."

XIX

THE FAITH THAT OVERCOMES

1 JOHN v. 1–12.

1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous.

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

6 This is He that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son.

10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made

Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

1 John v. 1–12.

THESE verses are really the closing section of the second half of this deep and wonderful epistle, that half which began at the 1st verse of the 3rd chapter, and whose keynote, it will be remembered, is, "God is Love." The remaining verses of this 5th chapter are really the conclusion and summary of the teaching of the whole epistle, as will be seen when we come to consider them in detail.

Faith and Love.

And here, at the outset, the first thing that strikes a careful reader of this epistle is, that in this last part of the epistle, St. John, for the first time, speaks of faith; and this is the more remarkable, when we remember that the whole burden of this second half of the epistle has been love in all its varied manifestations, both human and divine. Nor is this all. That the apostle should, ere he closes his letter, deal with faith is the more significant, when we remember that, as Dr. Plummer says, the *word* "faith" occurs nowhere else in the whole of St. John's writings, whereas the word "believe" recurs not less than six times in these thirteen verses, and

the word "faith" once, whilst the word "love" —St. John's favourite word, we might almost say—does not appear again in all the rest of this chapter. **1 John v. 1–12.**

But striking and suggestive as is the fact just noticed, there is the deepest of all reasons for this concluding emphasis of the epistle being laid on faith, for faith is itself the root and foundation of the whole Christian life, coming before love both in order of time and in importance. It is indeed not without meaning that the Christian Gospel is known by the short title "The Faith," for that Gospel begins in that sovereign and vital act of the soul that is called in the New Testament, "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." **Faith at the Root.**

In these few, but pregnant, verses St. John lets us see what are the issues, and what is the work of faith.

First of all, we are told that faith is the secret and source of the new birth. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." When a man believes the Gospel of the grace of God he does more than believe, for that act of faith is so vital and creative that it is the source of the new birth. As St. Paul says, he was "grafted" into Christ by faith. **Faith and the New Birth.**

And this fact at once shows us how poor and inadequate a conception they have of

1 John v. 1–12.

"faith" who regard it as being solely an act of belief. All faith, it is true, implies belief, but all belief does not imply faith. There is no necessarily ethical element in belief. There is in faith.

I may believe in the existence of a certain man of whom I have been told, but I may not believe in him; and this moral trust is always and everywhere the inseparable accompaniment and mark of faith. Salvation itself is more, far more, than believing that Jesus lived and died and rose again. It is believing *in* Jesus; it is that personal act of trust in Him by which we commit ourselves wholly to Him for our salvation from sin. And hence it is that such a faith at once opens the door of the heart for the Divine Spirit to enter in, by whom alone it is regenerated unto eternal life.

Faith and Our Love to God and Man.

But faith is more than the secret and source of the new birth. It is also, indirectly, the source of our love, both to God and to the children of God. The new birth creates a new spiritual relationship between the soul and God, and between the believer and all who are, like him, also believers in Christ. "Whosoever loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him." Love to the Father leads inevitably to love for all the children of the

Father. That is, the fatherhood of God is the only source of the real brotherhood of man. Socialist orators and writers are very fond of enlarging on this brotherhood of man, but Socialism is powerless to create the brotherhood of which it dreams. Brothers are born, not made, and it is only when men are born again that they become children of God and brethren of Christ Jesus. The only hope of the coming of that blessed day when all men shall be really brethren lies in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, with its offer of a new birth through faith to all mankind. **1 John v. 1–12.**

But this reference to the new birth that comes to the soul through faith leads the apostle to another great work of faith. "Whatsoever"— the significant neuter fastening our attention more on the new birth itself than on the person who is born again —"is begotten of God overcometh the world and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." "Hath overcome," or, as it might be even more correctly rendered, "overcame the world." St. John regards the victory as having been already won. One can hardly miss the implicit reference in these words to our Lord's own words: "I have overcome the world." **Faith and the Overcoming of the World.**

Indeed, His victory is the pledge and assur-

1 John v. 1–12.

ance of ours. Because He conquered, all who are His will conquer also. And yet in another verse, as the next verse tells us, the battle is still going on. The great victory is not yet won. "Who is he that overcometh the world" (present tense) "but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Both statements are true. Because Christ has won the victory, all who are His may say they have conquered too, and because the believer has faith in an all-victorious Lord, he goes on daily fighting the battle against the world, and winning daily victories too.

Faith and the Assurance of Eternal Life.

We shall have occasion to return to the still further statement of the victorious power of faith that follows this verse; but first of all let us notice the last great work of faith. It is the source of our assurance of eternal life. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in Him"—one meaning of which is in Christ Himself, not alone, as the Authorised Version has it, in "him," the believer. In other words, Christ becomes His own witness to the believing soul. He authenticates Himself.

This Faith is Faith in the Lord Jesus.

On the value of this direct witness to, and assurance of, eternal life we shall have something further to say later on, but first of all let us see what kind of faith this is which has these wonder-

ful and supernatural results; which is the source of the new birth by the Holy Ghost; which is the spring and fountain of all love, both human and divine; which is the victory over the world; and which is, lastly, the source of all our personal assurance of eternal life. The answer to this question St. John himself gives explicitly, and gives twice over in varying terms, in these verses: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ" (ver. 1), and "He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" (ver. 5). 1 John v. 1–12.

In both these statements there is an unmistakable reference to those debasing Gnostic heresies which we have seen were rampant in the Ephesians and in Asia Minor generally. As has been already pointed out, the Gnostics held that Jesus was an ordinary man, born of two human parents, Joseph and Mary, but that at His baptism the Christ descended upon Him from heaven, and remained with Him and in Him up to the time of His Passion, when the Christ once again returned to heaven, and that it was only the man Jesus who suffered and died on the cross. It is the True Faith.

Hence the significant emphasis laid on the belief that "Jesus is the Christ" in the 1st verse, and the equally significant emphasis in the 5th verse on belief that "Jesus is the Son of God."

1 John v. 1–12.

St. John knew that the Gnostic heresy utterly denied the reality of the Incarnation, and hence twice over he solemnly affirms that it is he alone who believes that Jesus—for he purposely uses the human name of our Lord—is the Christ and the Son of God who is "begotten of God" and who "overcomes the world."

Modern Heresy.

It might seem at first sight that we in this age are far enough removed from these old Gnostic heresies, and are in no danger of lapsing into their errors, but the same radical unbelief reproduces itself in many forms, and we may reach the Gnostic denial of the Incarnation, although by different roads.

When, for example, we are now told that Jesus was undoubtedly divine, but only in the same sense as, if in a greater degree than, all men are divine; or when His pre-existent glory as the Son of God is denied and His personal existence is made to begin with His birth at Bethlehem; or when His miraculous birth and miraculous resurrection from the dead and His supernatural ascension are denied; or when the divine significance of His death on the cross is ignored or doubted, and that death as the death of the Son of God for human sin is resolved into a sublimest act of heroism and self-sacrifice, we are travelling on a road

that leads by a very short way to the denial of the Incarnation. **1 John v. 1–12.**

Of one thing we may be assured, all unbelief that denies the Incarnation, and that refuses to see in the man Jesus the Christ and the Son of God, is a sterile faith. It gives him who holds it no assurance of being begotten of God, and it will never victoriously encounter and finally overcome the world. The life and the truth are ultimately one. Heresy has long ago proved itself to be an impotent force, incapable of any great spiritual or ethical fruits. **Unbelief Sterile.**

And now we come to a verse that has given rise to a very large amount of controversy, and that is one of the most difficult passages in the whole epistle. "This"—that is, Jesus, the Son of God, of whom the apostle had just spoken in the previous verse—"is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with water only, but with the water and with the blood." It would take far too much space, as well as be foreign to the immediate purpose of these devotional studies, to attempt to state and to discuss all the explanations which have been given of these words, and it will be sufficient if we give what seems to be the truest probable meaning. **The Lord Who came by Water and Blood.**

First of all, it is important carefully to note

1 John v. 1–12.

the meaning of the two different prepositions which are used in the verse. "He that came by water and blood," we read first—that is, "came by means of water and blood," and then a little later on we read, "not with," literally "not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood."

—In His Baptism and in His Death.

There can be little doubt, as it seems to the present writer, that the most natural and satisfactory interpretation of these words is that which makes them refer respectively to the baptism and the death of our Lord. In His baptism, which was the solemn inauguration of the ministry of our Lord, with the opened heavens, and the voice from heaven proclaiming Him to be the "beloved Son," and the descent of the Spirit upon Him, He came "through the water," "by means of" the water. His baptism, with all its solemn accompaniments and all its divine meaning, was the first great step manifesting the coming of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. But the Gnostics themselves admitted this, and taught, as it has been already pointed out, that it was at the baptism the "Christ" came and descended on the man Jesus. But, on the other hand, they denied that the Divine Christ, the Son of God, had any kind of part in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross, for the Eternal

Word left Jesus at His Passion. They admitted the Christ came by means of water; they denied that He ever came by means of blood, and so the apostle affirms "this is He who came by means of water and of blood," and, as if to make the assertion still more distinct and unmistakable, he adds, "Not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood." The same Son of God who was baptised was also crucified. He came "by means of the blood" as well as "by means of the water." **1 John v. 1–12.**

But what is the meaning of the sudden change of the preposition in the second half of this verse from "by means of" into "in"? I think that there is only one tenable explanation of the change, and that is, that St. John is here thinking of that significant fact which he alone of the Evangelists records, that when one of the soldiers pierced the side of Jesus as He hung on the cross "straightway there came out blood and water." How significant St. John felt this to be may be judged from the comment he appends to his record of the fact, "And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe" (John xix. 34, 35). The blood and the water which flowed from the wounded side were the witness to the twofold coming of Jesus, to **The Blood and Water from the Riven Side.**

1 John v. 1–12.

His baptism and His death, and to all they mean both for Him and for us.

The Two Sacraments Recalled.

But even now we have not exhausted all the meaning of these words, for we can hardly doubt that the issue of the "blood and water" from the side of Jesus, not only symbolised His own twofold coming "by means of water" and by means of blood, that is, pointed to His baptism and death, but also was a silent but impressive witness to these two sacraments which sum up all Christian truth, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and these two sacraments again witness to the twofold work and the twofold blessing the Son of God confers on all who are His—the pardon of sin and the cleansing from sin. And thus it is eternally true that the Son of God completes His divine mission by these two comings, "by means of the water and the blood"; or, if we take the order in which St. John tells us he saw the double stream issue from the wounded side of the Lord, "by means of the blood and the water," by His atoning death, and the purifying power of His Spirit.

The Three Witnesses.

This leads the apostle to the great closing lessons of this last section of his epistle, the witness that is borne to the divine facts and experiences of the Gospel. Ten times over in these few verses does the word "witness" occur,

although the significance of that recurrence is unhappily entirely concealed from the English reader by the unfortunate and most unwarranted varieties of translation of one and the same Greek word given in our Authorised Version. Instead of "witness" we have "record" (ver. 7) and "record" (ver. 11).

The Spurious Words.

And now let us see what are the witnesses thus borne to the truth of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. First of all, we must at once remove from our New Testament the words found in the 7th verse: "There are three that bear record (witness) in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." This famous verse, long supposed to be an undoubted witness to the Trinity, is, beyond all manner of doubt, no part of the Word of God. The words are found in no single manuscript older than the fifth century, and there in a Latin manuscript; and then they are found in no Greek manuscripts earlier than the fourteenth century. The Revised Version has therefore left them entirely out, and the only part of the text that is undoubtedly genuine are the words, "For there are three who bear witness," and then in the 8th verse follows the statement of who these three are, "the Spirit, and the Water, and the Blood: and the three

The Words that Remain.

1 John v. 1–12.

agree in one." There is one final witness to eternal life yet to be named, and this is found in the 10th verse. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness"—not "in himself" as the Authorised Version has it, but as the Revised Version more correctly renders the Greek—"in Him."

The meaning of this last witness we shall consider later on. First of all, let us carefully ponder the significance of the trinity of witnesses who, the apostle declares, "bear witness," the Spirit, the water, and the blood.

The Witness of the Spirit.

The Spirit naturally comes first, as He, and He alone, gives all the power to the witness of the water and the blood. But in what sense does St. John refer to the Spirit as bearing witness? I do not think this witness of the Spirit must be limited to that subjective witness, the *testimonium Sancti Spiritus*, which the Spirit bears in the heart of the believer—that inner witness comes later on, as we shall see when we come to the 10th verse, but I think the reference to the Spirit must be interpreted of that witness the Spirit has ever borne to the truth of God and the eternal life; by the new birth He quickens in the soul; by the sanctifying power He has exerted on the hearts of all true believers; by the power with which He has ever accompanied the faithful

preaching of the Gospel; by the illumination He has shed on the Word of God, in that the devout reader hears the very voice of God Himself in His Word; by the living witness He has borne to the truth in the creation and perpetuation of the Church of God, and by the slow but gradual and sure elevation He has imparted to the ethical life of mankind; and last of all, but greatest of all, by the inward witness the Spirit has ever borne to the heart of the believer that he does in very deed possess eternal life in the Son of God. Thus, in manifold and ever new ways, the Spirit "bears witness"; indeed, it may be truly said that without Him no witness is borne, or can be borne to the truth of God. **1 John v. 1–12.**

And now we come to the last two witnesses, "the water and the blood." It will be at once observed that this verse really repeats, for the sake of greater emphasis, what had already been said in the 6th verse, and consequently the "water and the blood" must have the same meaning here that they had there.

The Witness of the Water and the Blood.

We have already seen that "the water" can only refer to the baptism of our Lord, with all its solemn and glorious meaning, and the "blood" can only refer to His death on the cross. But in what sense do the baptism and death of Jesus bear "witness" to Him? "The real value," says

1 John v. 1–12.

Dr. Self, in his commentary on this epistle, quoted by Dr. Plummer, "of our Lord's baptism and death may be estimated by supposing that neither had taken place, and that our Lord had appeared on His mission without openly professing His mission from God in submitting to the baptism of John, or that He had died quietly as other men die." But even this explanation does not exhaust the rich meaning of the apostle's words. It is quite true that both the baptism and the Passion of our Lord, with their supernatural accompaniments, are a great witness to Him; but so also in every age have baptism and the Eucharist, the two sacraments Christ Himself instituted and left to His Church, borne their joint witness to Him. And this threefold witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, is a divine witness; it is God's own witness "concerning His Son," and because it is God's it is final, authoritative, and conclusive.

The Witness of the Believer.

One more witness, as we have seen, remains to be stated, one that sums up and embraces all the other three—"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in Him," that is, either in the Son of God Himself, or in himself in his own assurance of the truth of God. In either case this last witness is subjective, and within, just as the other three were objective, and for the

most part external, witnesses. The final witness to the Gospel of the Grace of God, to Jesus Himself, and to the Incarnation, lies in the inward experience and attitude of the believer. He can say, "We know that we have eternal life, and this life is in His Son." And this is why the assaults of sceptical unbelief—from the age of Celsus down to the present time, when under the guise of modern scholarship the blankest unbelief is really concealed—have ever failed to make any headway against the Gospel. The assurance of salvation in Christ is itself invincible. Each new believer in Christ is a fresh and original witness to the truth of Christianity; and so the volume of Christian evidence is never closed, never completed.

1 John v. 1–12.

It is still growing day by day, and all the accumulated assaults of unbelief are as powerless to affect it as the fury and foam of the waves dashing around the rock are to remove it from its foundation.

XX

THE BELIEVER'S PRAYER

1 John v. 13–16

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

14 And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us:

15 And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.

16 If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

1 John v. 13–16. The Witness of Life.

THE 11th and 12th verses are really the summary of the whole teaching of this epistle. In the preceding half of this last chapter the apostle has been speaking of the "witness" borne to the truth of God, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all that Gospel contains and reveals; and now, in this 11th verse, St. John sums up the supreme witness—the translation "record" in the A.V. most unhappily conceals the close connexion of this verse with what had gone

before—to the revelation that Gospel brings; the witness is this, "that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." The "gift of God," as St. Paul also calls it (Rom. vi. 23), is "eternal life." And it is its own witness. All life proves itself. There can be no proof of life so irresistible, so convincing, so absolute, as the life itself. Eternal life is its own best and final witness. And then the apostle closes his summary with a statement equally solemn, both on its positive and negative side. "He that hath the Son hath the life"—not life, as in A.V., it is "the life," eternal life, "the life that is life indeed" (1 Tim. vi. 19), of which the apostle is thinking—"he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." 1 John v. 13–16.

Life in Christ and in Christ Alone.

There is no possibility of evading the solemn significance of this double statement. We may not know, indeed we cannot certainly know, those who "have the Son," or those who have Him not; but this we do know, that apart from Christ there is no life. If He be not dwelling in the heart, we are dead, spiritually dead, whatsoever intellectual or ethical culture we may possess. There is only life that is "life indeed," the very life of God Himself, "eternal life"; and this life is only ours when we possess Christ.

"I came," Jesus said, "that they may have

1 John v. 13–16.

He came to offer Life.

life, and may have it abundantly"; and His great charge against the rulers of the Jews and the Pharisees was this—"Ye will not come to Me, that ye may have life." The Incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God were not only to bring to a sinful world the forgiveness of sins; they were to bring to a dead world eternal life. God Himself can offer or bestow no greater gift than this, for it is His own life, and nothing less than that, He gives to all who "have the Son."

The Apostle's Purpose.

Now from verses 13 to 21 we reach the conclusion of the whole epistle, and the apostle begins by stating the great purpose of his writing this letter. "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God." This is the true reading of this 13th verse, and avoids the meaningless repetition at the close of the verse found in the A.V., a repetition, indeed, that contains a statement completely out of accord with the real purpose of this epistle—"And that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." To lead to faith in Christ was not the purpose of this epistle. That was the object of the Gospel St. John wrote, as he himself states, "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the

—To Lead to Faith in Christ.

Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name" (John xx. 31). The Gospel was written to produce faith in Christ; the Epistle was written to produce the assurance of faith, "that ye may know that ye have eternal life." **1 John v. 13–16.**

The Believer's Boldness.

And the first fruit of this conscious possession of eternal life is boldness—not "confidence," as in the A.V.—in prayer. "This is the boldness which we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." For the fourth and last time in the epistle, the apostle touches on the subject of the Christian's boldness. Twice he speaks of it in connexion with the Day of Judgment (ii. 28, iv. 17); twice in connexion with approaching God in prayer (iii. 21, 22, and here) (Plummer, *in loc.*).

—In Prayer.

St. John begins with prayer generally. Any prayer that is in accordance with the will of God is heard and answered; and this assurance gives us, as children of God, "boldness" to approach God in prayer at all times. And we have not only to approach Him, but we have the answer actually in our possession here and now. St. John does not say we "shall have" the petitions which we have asked of Him, but "we have" them. The prayer is already heard, and its petition granted, even though for the time we can see no perceptible answer to our prayer.

1 John v. 13–16.

As our Lord Himself said in those remarkable and significant verses, "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth."

The Reason for this Boldness.

And the reason of this "boldness" is clear, the believer in Christ only desires what is the will of God. Should he, in ignorance or by mistake, ask that which is not in accordance with that will, no answer will come, and the believer is content that none should come. As that old saint, whom I have already quoted, said, "God always answers my prayers. Sometimes He answers 'Yes,' but sometimes He answers 'No.'" But the true believer has already made the will of God his own will, and just so far as this blessed submission to God's will is complete, every prayer he offers will be in accordance with the will of God; or, in other words, he will ask in Christ's name, and Christ Himself has promised, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do" (John xiv. 13).

The Limitations of Prayer.

Here, then, is the sole limit of prayer, so far as it concerns ourselves and our personal needs and desires. It must be in accordance with the will of God, and if it be, it will surely be answered; nay, it *is* answered as soon as uttered. But there is another limit when prayer is offered for others. Personal prayer has only one condition to be fulfilled, that it is in accordance with

the will of God. Intercessory prayer, on the other hand, has a second limit, and what that is we are told in the next verse. "If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God [or "He"] shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request." Here, then, is the one limitation to the power of intercessory prayer; it must not be offered for any one sinning unto death. **1 John v. 13–16.**

But this at once raises the very serious question, What does St. John mean by "sin not unto death," and "sin unto death"? No more unfortunate nor illegitimate insertion of a word in our translation, not found in the original Greek, can be instanced than the insertion of the indefinite article, both in the A.V. and the R.V., before "sin"—"there is *a* sin unto death," as if the apostle had in view some specific and isolated act of transgression. There is no "a" in the Greek. What St. John really wrote was this, "there is sin unto death," and it is inexplicable why the R.V. should have relegated this, the only true translation of St. John's words, to the margin, as it has done. **"Sin Unto Death."**

"Sin unto death" is not some individual and solitary sin, it is a state of sin, of persistent and **—What it is.**

1 John v. 13–16.

wilful rebellion against God, of closing the heart so obstinately against the entrance of His Spirit, that at last the door shall be so long closed as to be rusted on its hinges and the key unable to turn in the lock; thus the door shall be incapable of being opened. This is "sin unto death," and it is the same state of sin that is called, to use our misleading and wholly unscriptural name, "the sin against the Holy Ghost." There is no such thing as the sin—one particular sin—against the Holy Ghost. That awful blasphemy of the Spirit, of which Christ said it should "never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come," but that he who was guilty of it was "guilty of eternal sin," is not an isolated transgression, but, like the raving delirium of the drunkard, it is the final and most terrible outcome of a life of sin, ending at last in blaspheming the Holy One Himself.

Prayer for such a Sinner.

This is "sin unto death," and of it St. John says, "Not concerning this do I say that he should make request." It has been said that there is no hint in the epistle that we can tell who has committed or is committing this "sin unto death"; but the apostle's words would have no kind of practical meaning or relevancy if he did not think that the true believer may recognise this awful state of obduracy against God when

it exists. But, on the other hand, it is significant that St. John does not *forbid* prayer even in such a case; all he does is not to advise or command prayer. He leaves the question open and to the decision of each believer, only saying, "Not concerning it do I say that he should make request." And here the sudden change of verb, "make request" instead of "ask," as used three times over in the preceding verses (*cf.* vers. 14, 15, 16), cannot be without significance. The significance of the change seems to be this, that the second word, "make request," is a word, if anything, less *suppliant* than the former word "ask." That word is, in fact, the word that is used of our Lord's own prayer to the Father (*cf.* John xiv. 16; xvi. 26; xvii. 9, 15, 20), and seems to mark a request based on community of fellowship and feeling. St. John says such a prayer, the prayer of one brother for another, is not enjoined in the case of him who sins unto death. **1 John v. 13–16.**

The Power and Privilege of Intercessory Prayer.

This is the one and only possible limitation to the power of intercessory prayer. In all other cases that prayer is almost omnipotent in power and boundless in scope. It may, it will, actually result in the bestowal of life, eternal life, on the sinning soul. Oh, how feebly, even now, does the Church of God realise the power of intercessory supplication! How self-regarding are

1 John v. 13–16.

nearly all our prayers; how seldom do we leave our own sins and needs and sorrows and desires behind, and simply pray for others who are in need of our prayers; how little do we recognise the oneness of the Body of Christ, and that as we are "every one members one of another," that the sin and need of one are the sin and need of all, and that the thrill of intercession passes from one link to another in the sacred brotherhood, bringing spiritual power and blessing whereso-ever it is felt!

—Based on Sufficient Knowledge.

One other point in these words of the apostle must not be overlooked. He speaks of a brother actually detected in some overt act of transgression: "If any man *see* his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask." We are not even to pray for another on mere suspicion; we are to act on evidence that is unmistakable, the evidence of our own sight. The case, indeed, is precisely similar to that referred to by St. Paul —"If a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in a spirit of meekness" (Gal. vi. 1).

XXI

TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

1 JOHN v. 18–21

18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

19 *And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, *even* in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

1 John v. 18–21. The Thrice "We Know."

THE epistle closes with a solemn and most significant but most blessed statement of the triple knowledge of the true Christian. Three times over in as many succeeding verses St. John says, "We know." He has used this characteristic expression twice before (in ver. 15), but now he formally states the three great certainties of the spiritual knowledge of the believer. The thought of sin even amongst the brethren, of sin vanquished by the answer to intercessory prayer, naturally leads to the first certainty of the believer's knowledge, stated after St. John's manner in its ideal form.

1 John v. 18–21.

(1) Of Freedom from Sin.

"We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not." There is nothing at all inconsistent with what had just been said of a "brother sinning a sin not unto death" in these words, for just so far as the brother does sin in this way he is not yet "begotten of God." Any one fully experiencing and realising the divine new birth cannot sin, as St. John has already said in chap. iii. 9. But why this freedom from sin, this blessed inability to sin? Not because of anything in the believer himself, not because of his own strength of character or good resolution, but because—and there is no change in the R.V. from the A.V. more important and vital than the change we find in this single verse—"He that was begotten of God keepeth him." Compare these words with the A.V., "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself," as if the safety of the believer really depended on himself or his own watchfulness and strength, and we shall see instantly the full meaning and blessedness of what St. John really did say.

—Being Kept by the Lord.

"He that was begotten of God"—in other words, Christ Jesus Himself, "keepeth him." Our safety, blessed be God, does not depend on ourselves—if it did, we should not be safe for a single day or hour—but on Christ our Saviour, Master, and Lord. He keeps His own, as He

Himself said, "I kept them in Thy name" (John xvii. 12). He intercedes for His own—"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (John xvii. 15). **1 John v. 18–21.**

We sorely need the assurance of this "keeping" power of Christ, for we are faced by an enemy, personal, powerful, malignant, "the evil one"; but whatsoever be his power, howsoever subtle his devices, we have One mightier, wiser, on our side who keeps us; aye! and so keeps us that the evil one "lays not hold on us." "Toucheth him not," both in the A.V. and the R.V., is hardly true, for in the world and in conflict with the world, and with all its temptations and wickedness, "the evil one" may "touch" the believer; but he gets no hold on him. Whosoever has Christ for his defender is safe. He said, "No one shall snatch them out of My hand" (John. x. 28). We are made more than conquerors through Him that loved us. **—Who is Stronger than the Evil One.**

We now come to the second "we know," and here it is a double knowledge: first, that "we are of God," the preposition rendered "of" indicating the source of the life of the believer—God Himself; and secondly, that—in contrast, complete and final, to all whose life flows from God—"the whole world lieth in the evil one," **(2) Of Separation from the World.**

1 John v. 18–21.

that is, the world does not merely derive its existence and life from the evil one, it actually "lies" in him, abides in him, just as the Christian abides in Christ. The evil one does more than "lay hold" of the world, as he endeavours to lay hold of the child of God; he has the whole world absolutely and completely within the sphere of his own being—it "lies in him."

—Which is still under the Evil One.

But is this true of the world to-day, even if it was true of the world in the time of St. John? Eighteen centuries have passed by since the apostle wrote these words; centuries of Christian teaching and influence; centuries in which the leaven of the Gospel must surely, in some degree at least, have leavened the whole lump; centuries in which the atmosphere, or environment, surrounding the world must have been affected and purified by the influence of the Spirit of God and of the multitude of Christian lives which have been lived in the world; and if all this be true, surely it is impossible for it also to be as true to-day as it was in the apostle's age, that "the whole world lieth in the evil one"?

—Despite Christian Progress.

Then the world was utterly pagan and corrupt, hostile to the very name of Christianity, with unutterable cruelties and nameless vices everywhere; then morality and religion were so far from being indissolubly connected, that religion

itself was often the priestess of vice—one of the pagan temples was not allowed within the walls of Rome, lest the youth of Rome, so the decree ran, should be corrupted by its evil practices—then the contrast and antagonism between the Church of God and the world were absolute and complete, for one was darkness and the other light; but how is it with the Church and the world to-day? Has not the completeness of contrast to a large degree ceased? Instead of light on the one side and darkness on the other, are there not half-lights and half-shadows on both sides? And if there is a less violent contrast between the world and the Church now, than there was then, may it not be, not because the Church has become more worldly, but because the world has become more Christian; and if so, can it be still true that "the whole world lieth in the evil one"?

1 John v. 18–21.

No doubt it is true that in many respects the world has altered for the better since the time of the apostle. It is impossible to believe that Christianity has been in the world all these years without in some ways, and to some degree, affecting and changing the world. Indeed, we see the indirect effects of Christianity on every hand. The barbarities of war have ceased, the cruelties of torture of suspected persons are

—Which is a Real Progress.

1 John v. 18–21.

no longer permitted, the exposure of infants is a criminal offence in every civilised land, public opinion no longer tolerates nameless vices, the abominations of slavery and the slave trade have ceased. The rich, as a body, though with exceptions, realise they have duties to the poor as well as privileges to enjoy; the blessings of freedom, of civil and religious liberty, are in nearly every land—these are some only of the vast changes for the better that Christianity has effected in the world.

But Antagonism to Christ still exists.

And yet, when the whole tale has been told, when full allowance has been made for these indirect results and influences of Christianity, it still remains only too true that "the whole world 'lies' in the evil one." The antagonism of the world to Christ may be more thickly veiled; it has not ceased. The world is still one of the great trinity of evil the Christian has constantly to fight, and it is still as true as it was when St. John wrote the words: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," for "the world" is all the present temporal order of being outside of God.

Of Our Lord and His Mission.

And now we come to the third and last fact of which the Christian has certain knowledge. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know

Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." 1 John v. 18–21.

We know, first of all, the blessed reality of the Incarnation, that "the Son of God is come," and we know it because the Son of God has so opened our eyes, so enlightened our mind, that He has "given us an understanding," that we know, not in one finished act, but by a continuous and ever-deepening apprehension—"Him that is true," that is, the Eternal God Himself. The words recall our Lord's prayer, "that they should know Thee, the only true God" (John xvii. 3). And, as if to close the whole of the great certitudes of knowledge which the believer possesses, St. John adds, in final contrast with the world that lies in the evil one, "We are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." "This," that is, Jesus Christ "is the True God and Eternal Life." The great epistle closes with an echo of the opening words of the Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

A Final Warning.

And then, with one final warning—the latest voice of Scripture, Bishop Westcott rightly calls it—the letter ends, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." Ephesus was full of idols and of idol-worship, with idolatrous, licentious practices on every hand, and the warning was

1 John v. 18–21.

urgent and pressing. There is only one Being worthy of all worship and honour, the "true God," that true God who had manifested Himself in Jesus Christ; all other worship is idolatry, all other gods are idols.

—Still Needed.

We, too, may fitly close our meditation on this epistle with this warning sounding in our ears. It goes without saying that if the only idols were those of wood and of stone, before which the savage bows down, there would be little or no need for us to take this warning home. An idol, however, is anything that takes the place of God in the heart of man, anything we love more than God; and in this sense St. John's words are a warning to us all. Our money—for our idol is often made of gold—our ambitions, our amusements, even our love, may all of them, or any of them, be our idol, and we may give to them the worship due to God alone. May the prayer we so often hear be ours in the deepest truth!

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

THE END

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